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(See Page 5)

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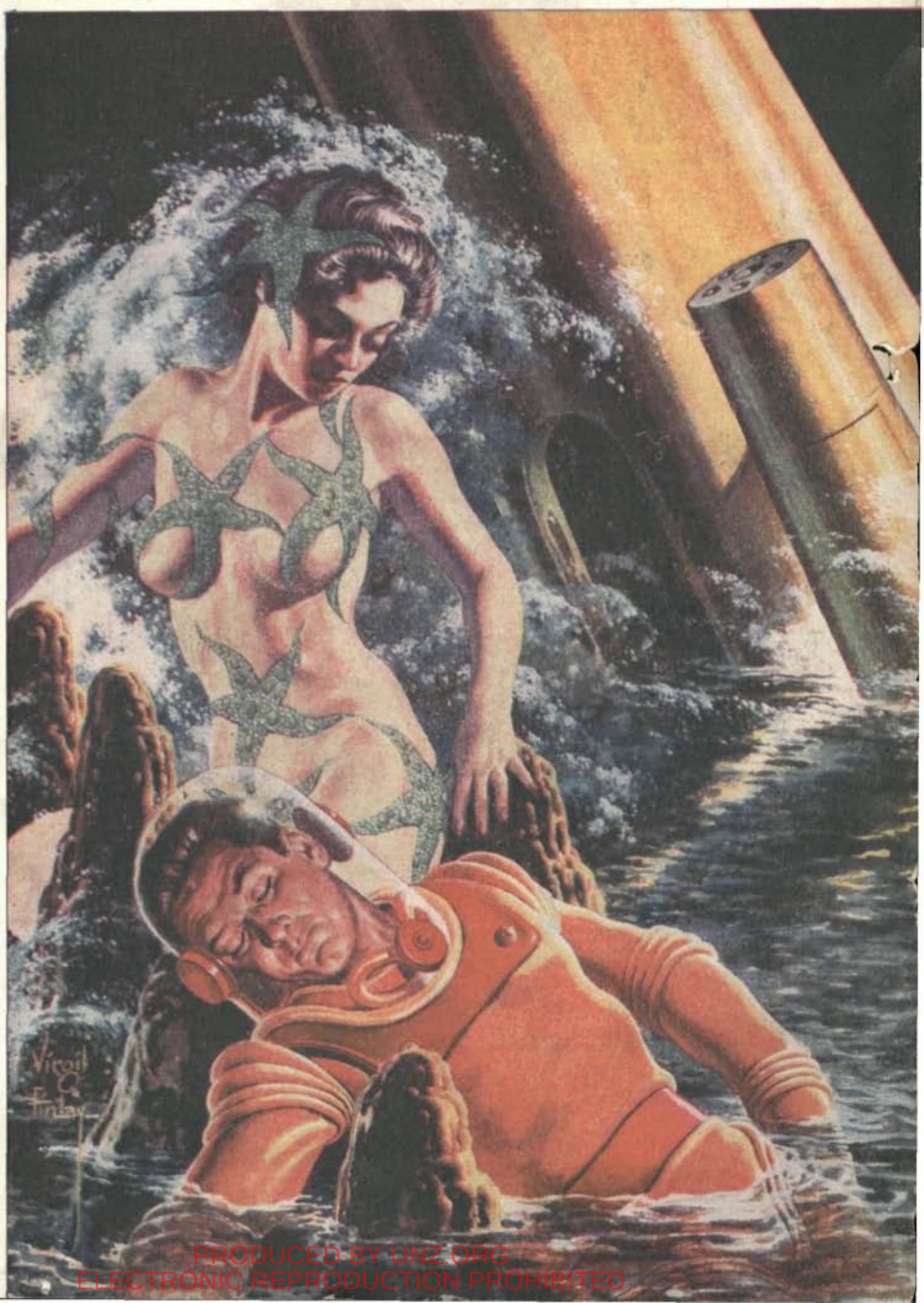

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Editorial

ALONG with "Br'er Rabbit", we've a "laughing place". It is between the covers of the various science publications we take, to keep us informed of what goes on in the wonderful world of science. We like to keep track of the world's progress, and the advance of its civilization in mechanical terms. "Laughing place?" you ask? Well, you might be right at that - - it isn't exactly a laughing matter. Perhaps we are being just a mite sarcastic when we call these magazines our "comic books". We read a book once called "Science Is A Sacred Cow", and it certainly was no laughing matter! It was the most serious thing we ever read. Actually, it is a tragedy.

Most people have a very erroneous idea of science, and an even more erroneous idea about scientists. They have some ideas about science fiction too. And their ideas produce the following result: they almost revere the scientist and his science; and they sneer at the science fiction. It should be the other way around!

Now don't get us wrong; when we say "sneer", we don't mean that in actuality. We merely mean that one should not look any more askance at science fiction than at the scientist. We'll try to explain - - and in the doing, we'll try not to be too bitter . . .

Since 1901, when the automobile was invented, this world has gone through the greatest mechanical and scientific advance the world has ever known (and this goes for many long-forgotten civilizations). In less than sixty years we've come from the horse-and-buggy to the space satellite. Where our grandmothers used to wash clothes with the aid of that wonderful invention, the washing board, we use a wash machine that practically thinks for itself. It mixes hot and cold water to the desired temperature for different fabrics, it rinses, spins dry, and even kills germs.

When we men climb into our new "wagon", we have over two hundred horses that can be guided at the touch of a finger, and we can race along the highways at better than 100 miles per hour (until we exchange the driver's seat for a coffin - - which is our fault, and not the machine's). All of us can sit in our living room and see events going on hundreds, thousands of miles away, as though we were present. In fact, there is no need to begin recounting the wonders about us; they are so myriad that it would take many years and many millions of words to describe. Perhaps even the giant mechanical brains with their millions of parts and tubes, would take days just to list them.

We are dazed by the progress that has come upon us. Monster planes and jets and even rockets whiz about our skies. Giant locomotives haul unbelieveable loads at 70 miles per hour across the country in a matter of days. And in our laboratories miracles take place that are unbelieveable. We transmute the elements, we smash the atom, we get power from the sun.

Our cities are incredible giants - - tens of millions of humans living in a beehive like no beehive ever dreamed of being. Our bodies can be literally torn apart and we can put them together again.

But we have one ugly despot which threatens to nullify the whole of this progress, render it nothing, plunder us as though robbers had held us up. That

(*Continued on page* 16)

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LET'S APPOINT A SUCCESSOR TO EDGAR RICE BURROUGHS

When the famous author of Tarzan, and John Carter of Mars, and all the other wonderful characters the whole world has come to know and love passed from this earthly scene, we lost more than we want to lose. Must these wonderful characters die too, because their creator is gone? Decidedly no! say thousands of Other Worlds readers. And now, something is being done about it—and you can take part!

THREE things are necessary to achieve the goal of this greatest of all science fiction fan projects: First, a writer who can recreate the wonderful realism of these historic characters. Second, the writing of these stories. Third, the permission and cooperation of the present owners of the copyright and title to the Edgar Rice Burroughs characters.

The first condition has been fulfilled in the person of John Bloodstone, whose wonderful stories have thrilled thousands, and whose life ambition is to fill the shoes of the writer he has admired and emulated since 1917. Here is a man whose already published works number in the millions of words, and whose ability is unquestioned.

The second condition also has been fulfilled. John Bloodstone, embarking on a labor of love, without thought of gain, certain that his only right is to write the story, then do nothing with it, has written a John Carter-Tarzan novel which he calls "Tarzan On Mars", totalling 110,000 words, purely to demonstrate his remarkable qualifications for the honor of being named the logical successor to Edgar Rice Burroughs. On the word of such renowned science fiction experts as Forrest J. Ackerman, Ray Bradbury, Everett E. Evans, your own editor (to mention just a few), this is a *sensational* story, truly proof that John Bloodstone is the new Burroughs. Could any greater tribute to a great writer be paid than this tremendous effort on the part of John Bloodstone? No mere proposition here, but an *established fact*, a monumental work, a terrific novel!

The third condition seems to us to be the most simple of all. To appoint a legal successor to write more adventures of the greatest science fiction characters of all time, is but a reasonable reaction to the heartfelt wishes of many, many thousands of readers, who *pledge* their perpetual loyalty. The demand exists, as this magazine is ready to prove. Your editor hereby humbly requests that the Edgar Rice Burroughs, Inc., of Tarzana, California, appoint John Bloodstone to write more stories in the Burroughs tradition, and that they begin by authorizing the publication of TARZAN ON MARS.

Let's Bring John Carter Back To Life!

Write Today To

Edgar Rice Burroughs, Inc., Tarzana, California

and say:

Appoint John Bloodstone to be legal successor to Edgar Rice Burroughs!

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The GROVE of GOD

By Robert Moore Williams

"Taboo," other editors said. We don't agree. We think this is a beautiful story, and a credit to its author. If this steps on your toes, you ought to be burning prayer sticks in a joss house rather than reading science fiction!

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A man shall start out for the ends of the Universe - - -

From the Book of Is, Author unknown.

THE Chaplain, Tel Koner, was attracted by the river and the trees growing there. He moved in that direction. He was not needed in the hubbub behind him, where the commander was conferring with the inhabitants of this strange planet, trying to discover where they were. The communication specialists, the anthropologists, the chemists, the soil and air men, and particularly the navigators, were all busy, the latter exceedingly so. No navigator ever liked to admit that his ship was lost in space.

Only Tel Koner was not needed. He wondered, sadly, why the Earth authorities included a religious man on a scientific expedition planned to explore deep space. Even when the *Andromeda* had run into that strange region of space and blackness had been all around them and the ship had cracked and groaned and men had cried out in fear, nobody had asked for the Chaplain. Men in fear no longer needed consolation and comfort. This need had been conditioned out of them, even if the fear had not.

And even after they had landed here, knowing the *Andromeda* was hopelessly lost in space, they did not need the Chaplain, unless after conferring with his God, he could point and say dramatically, "Earth is that way!" The Chaplain couldn't do that. And even if he had been able to do it, he doubted if he would do it. He owed something to the nerves of the navigators.

The trees and the shrubbery were a pleasant shade of green, the grass under his feet was soft, the sun - - - a little shudder passed through him. The day was as bright as midafternoon on Earth, but there was no sun.

"I wonder what happened to it?" Blake said, beside him. Startled, Tel Koner turned. He had not noticed his assistant fall into step beside him.

"Happened with what?" he asked.

"The sun." Blake answered, nodding upward.

"Perhaps they never had one." Tel Koner guessed. "We found this planet here in the void, detached from any sun system. They may never have had a central luminary." The explanation pleased him. Blake shrugged but said nothing more. "How are they doing back there?" the Chaplain asked, nodding backward toward the ship.

"They're asking questions but not getting any answers. I think Carson is going to have a nervous breakdown any minute." Carson was chief navigator.

"I'm sorry," Tel Koner said. "How are the natives taking the questioning?"

"Cool, calm, and collected," Blake answered. "I do not understand these natives. This is the first space ship they have ever seen, but they were not surprised."

"I noticed that," the Chaplain answered. When the *Andromeda* had come down for a landing, a few natives had been on the meadow, apparently playing games there. When they had seen that the ship was going to land on the meadow, they had walked calmly to the shade of the trees beside the river and had waited there without concern while the ship eased itself down out of the sky. The first landing party, heavily armed against possible attack, had brought them to the ship. Three males, tall, light skinned, completely naked - - - and completely unafraid. Tel Koner had not been concerned because the natives were naked - - - wide experience in the Solar System had taught him there was nothing immoral about nakedness - - - but the fact that they had been completely unafraid had worried him. Didn't they even know the meaning of sin?

"This is a funny world," Blake said. "Somehow it reminds me of home."

"Wishful thinking," Tel Koner said.

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"But I'm sorry it is that." They came to the trees and the river. A wind went quietly among the trees, rustling the leaves. The stream flowed quietly. Blake took a deep breath and sighed. "It is certainly peaceful here."

"Yes," the Chaplain said. It seemed to him in this moment, here in this peaceful place, that the space-pitted hull of the *Andromeda* was an intruder, that both ship and crew were serpents come into Paradise. He put the thought out of his mind. They were not serpents and he doubted that this place was Paradise even if it did look peaceful.

"There's a child!" Blake said, surprise in his voice.

At first, Tel Koner could discern nothing. Then he saw the child, a girl of about five, quietly watching them from the shrubbery. "Come out," he said. Remembering his own son and daughter, he also remembered that he liked children. The child did not move.

"Here," Blake said, offering her a stick of gum.

The Chaplain took the gum and waved it at the child. He made chewing movements with his jaws and smacked his lips to show her how good it was. She was completely unimpressed with his offer.

"She doesn't know what it is. How can I tell her it's good?"

"Maybe it isn't good, for her. Maybe she likes grass or leaves," Blake said.

"Don't be silly."

"All right. But I haven't seen a planted field or any evidence of agriculture. What do these people eat if they don't eat grass or leaves?"

"Perhaps they are few in number."

"That may be. But I can see several of them, just by looking."

Tel Koner followed the line of Blake's pointing finger. Across the stream was a growth of trees. Beyond was a hill and beyond that were low mountains. In little groups and singly, hundreds of people were standing at the edge of the trees.

A little pulse of fright came up in Tel Koner. But, so far as he could tell, they were not a threat. "Just watching us," he said. The fright went away.

"Even if they spent all day just watching, they've still got to eat." Blake said firmly. He turned to look toward the ship. A burly sky marine sergeant and two men were approaching. All three were armed.

"There's a kid around here somewhere, Chaplain," the sergeant said. "One of the language monkeys - - - begging your pardon, sir, I mean one of the linguistic specialists - - - has figured out that the tall bum, I mean the tall native, wants the kid. So they sent us to get him."

"There will be no rough treatment, sergeant."

"Of course not, sir."

"In that case, the only child we have seen is right over there." He pointed to the shrubbery. "No. She isn't there. Where did she go, Blake?"

"There she is," Blake said, pointing. "She just moved a little."

The sergeant saw her. "You two stay here, I'll get her," he said to his men. He moved confidently into the shrubbery and was out of sight. A few minutes later he cried out. Sounds of breaking shrubbery followed. The sergeant, his face scratched, came out. "The danged little witch dodges," he said. "Twice I had her but she skipped out of my hands. Slippery as a snake, that kid is."

"There she is again, Sarge," one of the men said.

The child was standing just at the edge of the shrubbery, almost within reach of the sergeant's hand, smiling at him. He swore and dived at her. Swearing harder than ever, he pulled himself back out of the bushes. "Where in the hell did she go?"

"She just dodged, Sergeant," Tel Koner said. Actually the child had moved so fast that his eyes could hardly

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follow her motion. "She's over there now." He pointed to a large tree. The child was standing in front of the tree. She was watching these aliens with bright, eager eyes.

"This time we'll get her for sure," the sergeant said.

"I'd like to bet on that," Blake whispered to the Chaplain.

"I think I would back your bet," Tel Koner answered, and was surprised that he knew such language. They watched the sergeant approach from the front, with the two marines coming up from behind. She waited until he got within an arm's reach of her. She waited until his fingers were within inches of her, until he lunged. Then she laughed, and moved. A man snatched at her from behind. She laughed, and twisted. The marine's hands caught empty air and he fell heavily. The sergeant dived at her. She slid out of his grasp. The third man saw his opportunity but before he could touch her, she was fifteen feet out of his reach.

The sergeant pulled himself to his feet. Real anger was coming up in him now. Before he could take further action, a call came from the ship. Looking in that direction, Tel Koner saw that the three natives had come out of the ship and were approaching. Accompanying them were the linguistic experts and several of the *Andromeda's* officers. At the sound of the call, the child left the shrubbery. Her short legs twinkled across the grass in such rapid movement that the Chaplain had the impression they were not even touching the ground. She leaped into the arms of the tallest native. He tossed her high into the air and caught her as she came down, all happy squeals and wiggles.

"Eth!" the tall native said, pointing to the child. He squatted on the grass. The linguistic men sat down in a circle around them. Seeing that a conference was taking place, Tel Koner moved to stand outside the circle and watch. A wistfulness came up in him at the sight of the child in the lap of the tall native. He assumed she was his child. "These barbarians cherish their young," he thought. And felt good about that. Watching, he saw why the linguistic men had sent for this child. Within ten minutes, she had learned enough English to talk to them!

"Who is the man who is holding you?" Hannum, chief of linguistics, asked.

"Daddy!" she promptly answered.

"What do you call your world?"

"Home."

"I didn't mean quite that," Hannum explained. "Our world is Earth. It is also home - - - "

"You have two names for home! Fun!" She clapped her hands and looked up at her father, who smiled fondly at her.

"Let me talk to her," Carson, the chief navigator asked. He began asking questions, but these the child could not answer. Carson sent back to the ship for maps, star pictures which might reveal where a ship was and which way it might go to reach its home. The child stared at them. "Pretty," she said.

"She likes the colors," Carson said bitterly. "Let's take her into the ship and show her our three dimensional model of the universe. Perhaps she can understand that."

Tel Koner watched them go back to the ship. Eth rode on the shoulders of her father.

"And a little child shall lead them," Blake said softly beside him.

"Eh? Yes, of course. But I believe the original meaning was different."

"The meaning is what we give it. If they use her to find out how to return to Earth, won't it work out that a little child has led us?" Blake set his jaw and the Chaplain could see that he was preparing to be stubborn.

"I want to talk to Eth after they have finished with her," Tel Koner said. "Meanwhile, I suggest we climb to the top of the hill there and take a look

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at this world. Ah, Topham! Would you care to join us?" The last was spoken to the chief physicist of the expedition, who had remained behind after the others had gone into the *Andromeda*.

"Thank you. I was thinking of doing the same thing myself. You know, I've been wondering: Haven't these people developed even the rudiments of science?"

"I have been asking the same question about their religion," Tel Koner said. Although he and Topham were poles apart in some of their thinking, they were firm friends. "And Blake has been wondering how they feed themselves, since they haven't developed agriculture."

The natives watching from the edge of the trees on the slope did not flee as the humans approached. Nor did they show any pleasure. They were interested, but unimpressed. "I do not even begin to understand them," Blake said, shaking his head. "They seem to me to be detached from their environment. They are in it, but not of it."

The natives showed no interest in trying to talk to the three men.

From the top of the hill a rolling world lay before their eyes, meadows, small streams, and groves of trees. Wild animals grazed in the meadows but there was no evidence of a tame animal, no beast of burden. No city, not even a small village, could be seen. No trail of factory smoke showed on the far horizon.

"No industrial development," Topham said.

"No moral values, no spiritual values - - - and no science," Tel Koner said. He added the last with a certain relish. Secretly he was pleased to learn that a world and a people could exist close to nature.

Topham heard the dig and resented it. "And no temples!"

Tel Koner was silent. He knew he had touched his friend in a raw spot and had gotten back exactly what he had sent.

"I wonder if the seed of the future is here," Blake said, musingly. "We have seen races on many planets. Some were farther advanced than we were on Earth, but most were far behind us. The race here seems to be waiting. As a field waits for the seed, perhaps these people are waiting for the coming of the quickening spirit - - - " His voice trailed off into silence as if he were wondering what was the meaning of the word *spirit*.

"Perhaps the explanation lies in the fact that there is no threat here," Topham said. "Where there is no challenge, nothing disturbs the equilibrium and everything remains the same forever. Perhaps change has stopped here." He seemed pleased with this explanation.

"Perhaps they have met all their challenges, and solved them," Blake said.

The expression on Topham's face said he was wondering if the younger man was out of his mind. "Life cannot exist without a challenge. That is what life is, a challenge to Chaos. It is the organizational principle that gives order and form to the undifferentiated matter of Chaos." The physicist spoke with conviction and with some heat.

"Look! Something is happening at the *Andromeda!*" Blake said pointing.

Men had come boiling out of the space ship. The tall one carrying Eth, the three natives were running from the ship toward the trees and the stream. Some of the crew were running after them, shouting. Others were milling in circles. The natives and the child reached the shrubbery and disappeared.

"Have they gone crazy?" Topham demanded.

Vague shouts of angry argument came to them. Tel Koner could see Carson holding his maps and looking at the sky. One man was running from the ship, fleeing from it as if it were a thing accursed. Others were arguing with each other.

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An instant later, Topham was running down the hillside, Blake was following him and Tel Koner was following both of them. Before they reached the stream, a sullen roar began to sound ahead of them, atomic engines beginning to develop their hellish overload. They splashed through the stream as fast as they could, shouting and waving, but the *Andromeda* had blasted into the sky before they reached the meadow.

A few dazed and confused humans were milling on the meadow. One was Carson, the navigator. Tel Koner started toward Carson, but Blake outdistanced him.

"But what went wrong?" Blake shouted at the navigator.

Carson seemed to have trouble in hearing him. His eyes were going from the dwindling mote in the sky that was the *Andromeda* back to the charts in his hand. "Nothing. Nothing went wrong," he answered. "Or everything."

"But something went wrong! Why did the ship leave?"

"Because everything went wrong," Carson answered. His eyes were glazed.

"You fool!" Blake was shaking the navigator when Tel Koner reached them.

"Please! Can't you see the man is in shock? No matter what question you ask him, you can't get an intelligent answer out of him when he's in this condition."

"I did give you intelligent answers!" Carson said, his voice hot. "You damned fools, can't you understand anything?" Even his back seemed to bristle with rage and indignation as he turned and stalked away. Topham stopped him.

"But when will they be back?" Tel Koner heard Topham demand.

"If that kid told the truth, they aren't coming back!" Carson's voice was an angry shout. "Where is she? Where is she, I say?"

"Why do you want the child?" Tel Koner spoke quickly.

"I want to talk to her." Carson started toward the river.

"If you harm her, you will answer to me," Tel Koner said.

"Who in hell said anything about harming her? I want to talk to her. I want to ask her some questions. She's got to be a liar! She's simply got to be!" Reeling like a drunken man, or like a man in deep shock, the navigator continued toward the river.

"What happened?" Tel Koner asked. He asked this question to every human who had been left behind. Blake asked it. Topham asked the same question. When they compared notes, they discovered they had as many answers as they had asked different people but that none of the answers fitted together into a coherent picture that made sense. There was no reason why the *Andromeda* should have left. Carson was the only man who could know definitely, but the navigator, spending all his time looking for Eth, refused to talk.

"But the *Andromeda* just can't go off and leave us here," Topham said, over and over again.

Sudden inspiration spurted in Tel Koner. "If the *Andromeda* doesn't come back, perhaps you and the others can build another ship!" It seemed simple to him. Just build another vessel.

"Are you out of your mind?" Topham answered. "We should build a ship capable of navigating space? Don't you understand that such a vessel is the end-product of an enormous technology? Where are the iron mines from which to dig the ore, where are the miners to dig it, where are the smelters to convert the ore into iron and then into steel, where are the alloys to blend with the steel? And that is only the beginning. Where would you get the copper, for wiring the electrical system, the fine glass for the optical instruments, the plastic for the ports? Chaplain - - - " Topham threw up his hands in growing anger.

Tel Koner felt very uncomfortable as the sudden hope died. He had not under-

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stood all of these details and he felt like a child when they were called to his attention.

"Were you kidding me?" Topham was suddenly very angry. "Were you pulling my leg when you suggested that we build a ship? If you were doing that, then I have a question for you: Why don't you ask God to create one? It would be easier, and simpler."

"Topham, this is sacrilege!" Both anger and sudden pain were in Tel Koner. He felt outraged.

"Father!" Blake said quickly.

Tel Koner let the anger go out of him. "Thank you, my son!" He turned to Topham, to apologize, but the angry scientist was stalking away. Unresolved was the problem of what they were going to do.

"Eth might have an answer." Blake suggested.

The question of what they were going to do was one which Tel Koner asked himself many times during the days that followed, while they were looking for Eth. The tall native constituted himself their guide and helper. First, by signs largely, he told them that his name was Nobe. Then he showed them how to get food, a small fruit that grew wild on the trees. "It is to eat," Nobe explained. It wrinkled the mouths of the humans and left them with a gauntness inside but Nobe insisted this was all anyone ate. He seemed astonished that humans could desire anything else. "Drink?" He led them to the nearest stream, pointed to the water. "It is to drink." "Sleep?" He showed them the soft grass. "It is to sleep." He spread his hands when his charges seemed unsatisfied. Could any life form want more than this?

But he would not tell them where to find Eth. "She is with her father."

"But aren't you her father?" Tel Koner said, astonished. "I thought - - -"

"Yes. That is - - -" Nobe looked more closely at Tel Koner. "She has many fathers. All of us are her father."

"Some form of polyandry," Tel Koner thought. Perhaps a tribal belief that every man was the father of every child and every woman was its mother. Such beliefs had existed in Earth's past, before men had learned the facts of chromosones, gene structure, and heredity.

"Eth will come when she is ready," Nobe explained. "No one sends for Eth, or seeks her. She comes." To him, this seemed a satisfactory answer.

It was not satisfactory to the humans. Nothing satisfied them. The food did not taste good and the water was brackish and the grass did not make an adequate bed. Always they watched the sky, secretly, each one taking care that no one else should catch him doing this, each hoping that he would see the *Andromeda* returning. Carson muttered something about the region of space the *Andromeda* had run into just before she had gotten lost and had found this planet, trying to explain to himself that in entering this region they had been displaced out of their own space. It was an adequate explanation but it did not supply an answer to their problem.

Nobe even tried to explain about the ship. "It has gone to an isn't," he said. Nobody understood him. Seeing this, he stopped trying to explain. Blake drooped like a shadow, growing more thin and gaunt with each day that did not pass but which remained the same forever. The absence of a period of darkness was irritating. On the ship, they had maintained artificial darkness for periods. And something else was bothering Blake.

"We are kind of poison to these people," he tried to explain. "We breathe their air into us, then breathe it out again, but we have done something to it that makes it less healthful to them. It may be that they will not like this very long."

The warning disturbed Tel Koner. Deep inside him, he knew he was good. He did not like even the thought of

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harming a primitive life form.

"But maybe I'm wrong," Blake said. He shrugged and walked away.

Tel Koner continued his fruitless search for Eth. Then, returning from a long tramp across the countryside, he found she had come in his absence to the meadow where the *Andromeda* had landed. He glimpsed her from across the stream. She was sitting in Nobe's lap and all the humans were grouped around her.

Tel Koner hurried toward the group. As he passed through the trees and splashed across the stream, he lost sight of them. Bursting into the open, he stopped appalled.

A space ship was resting on the meadow. Its hull gleamed brightly in this land where there was no sun. As if entranced the group of humans stared at the ship. Eth stared at it. Not a man moved in the group. Tel Koner stumbled forward. A thought which he hardly dared express was in him. He tried to force it down but it burst from his lips.

"She - - - the child - - - is creating that ship!"

Neither Eth nor any of the humans seemed to hear him. Only Nobe looked up at him. The native's lips groped for words but the apologetic gesture of his hands conveyed the meaning more clearly. "Yes. She is only a child and still finds pleasure in this play of creation. We who have passed beyond this stage find little joy in it, but we like to humor our children." Again Nobe's hands traced their apologetic movement in the air. "Of course, she is not alone. We help." Nobe's hands made a gesture outward.

Following the line of the moving hand, Tel Koner saw that hundreds of these people were visible now. Perhaps there were thousands of them in sight. They stood along the fringe of trees and beside the grassy stream, quietly watching. Dimly he had the impression that back of these people, in a long procession that seemed to stretch away forever, were millions of others, their forebears in an evolutionary process that left the mind reeling as it tried to grasp the implications.

A human rose from the group. It was Topham. Walking like a man in a dream, or like a man who has made up his mind what he is going to do and is going to do it no matter what the consequences. Topham approached the bright hull of the new ship. He felt of it with his fingers, then stared at his fingers, then struck at it savagely with his fist - - - and cried out from the pain of broken knuckles.

Topham stumbled back to the group. "But that ship is not possible," he said. His eyes came to the blood on his hand and to the broken knuckles.

"You asked God to create a space ship. Now God has done it!" Tel Koner cried out in truimph.

Topham's dazed and wondering eyes came to him. "Do you think so? I think something else. I think I know what has happened to the science of this world. It has gone inside these people, it has been internalized. E equals MC squared is now a neural connection in the brain of a child." The daze fled from Topham's eyes and they became bright with illumination. "These people are not primitives. They are such super scientists that they can afford to live close to nature. Sometime in the past, they met all challenges and overcame them. Now they hold nature inside their brain cases, they catch the dawn in the palms of their hands, they capture the sunset in a neural net - - -"

"With no sun?" Blake said. Topham was suddenly silent.

Tel Koner was silent too. The feeling of truimph that he had known was gone, fled into some void that he did not understand. Something else was coming up inside him. He did not know what it was but he could feel it beginning to surge through him. Words came with it,

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but went away before he could grasp them. Topham, silent, was looking both pleased and unhappy.

The ship came into full existence there on that quiet meadow. Without quite knowing how he knew it, Tel Koner knew that this ship would fly, that inside it would be driving engines as stout as those of the *Andromeda*, that the navigation and steering equipment would be there, that there would be adequate supplies, perhaps even books to make pleasant the time during the long journey home.

Home! The word was an echo out of a deep well inside him. The word was like the sound of a great bell. With the word came thoughts of home, the sights and the smells and the feels of Earth, of dear familiar faces and of wondrous places. These thoughts came as a deep longing. And began to go away as soon as they came. Other thoughts, and the words that Tel Koner could not quite grasp, were pushing them from beneath.

Eth slid out of Nobe's arms and pointed to the ship. "Use it and go see for yourselves whether or not I lie." Her words were a childish prattle. She looked at Carson as she spoke. The navigator did not answer but stood frozen.

The miracle ship sat there on the green grass of the meadow, with the lock invitingly open. All the humans had to do was enter. Even if they were short-handed, they could fly this ship. Topham moved toward the vessel, one tottering step. Blake stood like a rock. Tel Koner started to move, bumped into his assistant and was stopped by Blake's long arm.

"Listen!" Blake whispered.

A sound was in the sky, a far-off rumble. Tel Koner listened and tried to tell himself that he did not know what he was hearing. Topham heard the same rumble. The scientist stopped and looked upward.

The rumble in the sky was the *Andromeda* coming down.

The space ship settled into the meadow. In the watching group, not a man moved. The pitted hull of the *Andromeda* came to rest beside the bright hull of the miracle ship, the miracle vessel that gleamed so bright here in this world where no sun shone. The locks of the *Andromeda* opened. Men came out. They glanced at the bright shining miracle ship, then looked away as if it were of no importance, now. They moved toward the group. Carson got up but did not move to meet them. They came to Topham. One nodded toward Eth.

"The kid was right. We went out and took a look from space to make certain. Up high, you can see the old mountain chains and the shapes of the old seas. We missed these landmarks coming down but there is no question about it. *This is Earth.*"

Earth, this place of meadows and of streams and of green forests and of naked natives!

"Earth?" Topham whispered. Disbelief beyond words showed on his face. "But these people here are super- scientists - - -"

The commander of the *Andromeda* was speaking. "That may be. But they are also our descendents."

"But - - - but - - -" Suddenly Topham caught another idea, one so tremendous that it seemed to shock him. As the shock went, triumph began to come again, to take its place. "If they are our descendents, then the work we did, the equations we wrote, the problems we solved, the space ships we built, the bits and pieces of the puzzle of the Universe that we fitted together and the ones we did not fit together, have been brought to a final solution here, as a neural net inside the brain case of a human being. And our descendents manipulate and use the world outside of them as we manipulated and used our equations and the machines that were the product of our equations."

Triumph glowed in Topham's eyes. It

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was Blake who spoke. Blake had seemed to grasp all of this better than anyone else. "But that is where the equations came from in the first place," Blake said.

"Eh?" Topham was caught between triumph and doubt.

Blake nodded toward the scarred hull of the *Andromeda*. "Wasn't she only an idea in the mind of a man in the first place? Didn't the idea come into existence before the ship?"

"Y - - - es."

Blake nodded then toward the miracle vessel. "This second ship also started as an idea. It was brought into existence as a way to solve our need to know where we were and how to go to get home. But it started as an idea and the only difference between it and the *Andromeda* is that the second ship took a different, more direct route of coming into existence as solid metal." Blake's words were forceful. They carried conviction with them.

"Well - - -" Topham hesitated.

Tel Koner was speaking. "And as the science went inside our descendents, went back into the brain cases from which the ideas had come in the first place, went back differently and in a more useful form, so also went the religion we once knew. The temples went, the rituals went, the cant and the dogma, and the futile quarrelling of the creeds went. Now both religion and science, both much changed, are back where they came from - - - the mind of a man and of a god!"

A ripple went over his hearers. The men who had come out of the *Andromeda* listened. The ones who had been left behind were quiet. The natives - - - the far-removed sons and daughters - - - were still. More words came into Tel Koner's mind. "The groves were God's first temples - - -" As he spoke, he knew that these were still not the words he wanted, these still eluded him. But the words he had used had expressed a partial truth. As Topham had thought these natives were unscientific, and had learned they were actually super-scientists, so he had thought they were not religious. Now he saw that they were also super-religious. But they were living their religion as they were living their science.

"But - - - home? - - -" Topham whispered.

"This is - - - home," Tel Koner answered. Sadness - - - he would never again see the faces of his loved ones - - - came. It went as a flash. There in Eth was the far-removed daughter of his daughter. And gladness came.

"But, the sun?" Blake said. "I see it all, except what they did with the sun?"

Eth answered him. Her voice was a childish whisper in a vast silence. "There was danger of a star collision. We moved our planet to escape this danger. All of this happened very long ago. But the sun is now far away, as a dark star. It became that after the collision. We who are here are our own sun," she added suddenly, as if this explained everything.

"We are our own sun?" Tel Koner spoke. He and Blake seemed to see the answer simultaneously as if both drew it in the same instant from the same source. As Tel Koner saw the answer, the words that he had been trying to find came unbidden into his mind.

He lifted his hand.

"*Now is achieved the goal - - -*" His voice suddenly had the ring of the deep bell in it. And like a bell sound, his voice rolled over these people.

"*Now is achieved the goal of Thy vast dreaming!*" Tel Koner intoned. These were the words he wanted. He spoke them in a tone that was almost a chant. Not of triumph. Not of victory. *Understanding*. And one other thing - - - acceptance.

A man shall start out for the ends of the Universe - - - -

- - - - ***and shall meet himself coming back.***

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Editorial...

(*Continued from page 4*)

one thing is the dollar bill!

You, dear beneficiary of this wonderful civilization of ours, are being cheated! You are being deluded. You are being robbed. And you may even be murdered!

Let's go back and take that washing machine. And if you *do* take it, chances are you are going to be stuck! Take any household, office, or shop gadget; any device at all, which is turned out on a production line and purchased by everyone to give us our vaunted "standard" of living. Have you bought one recently? Is it the scientific miracle the salesman told you it was when he persuaded you to put up an amazingly exorbitant price? Has it served you faithfully? Has it proven a creditable example of the genius of the scientist? Is it really wonderfully civilized?

Or has it broken down, required expensive repairs, almost before the installing workmen vanished pellmell down the road! Has it proved to be so carelessly designed, that it was evident the designers had never left their drafting boards to discover if their ideas were practical? Has it been so faultily constructed, in spite of good design, by the necessity of production-line speed, that a tiny gear stamped out of sheet metal by a giant press is not the polished, burr-less gear that a conscientious craftsman would have turned out by hand? Does some insignificant part immediately detach itself and become lost because it is held on by a spring-clamp which is made of spring "steel" that has about as much springiness as a sponge? And finally, when you went to get this insignificant part, to repair your machine, did you find that it was "last year's model" and wasn't even being made any more! so that for want of a shoe the horse was lost?

Have you seen the glowing advertisements of a certain product being tested savagely in the laboratory, being subjected to a rapidly stepped-up punishment similar to that it would receive in actual use? Impressed, were you? The manufacturer wants to show you how long it will last! He has a machine that turns an electric switch on and off twelve thousand, six hundred and eighty-seven times before it breaks. He tests hundreds of switches. The average "life" is a very important discovery to him. But what does it mean to *you*? It means that he can now guarantee this switch for one year. Not one year and ten days, because the average life, he's discovered, is one year and ten days.

An honest man, you say? But let's go behind the scenes. A year is too long. He can't do enough "replacement" or repair business to make a profit. He calls in his scientists. He tells them he wants this switch to break down in six months. And back to the laboratories the scientists go, and soon they emerge with a switch that will break down, on the average, in six months and ten days. So, the guarantee is placed at six months. The manufacturer does not want to replace your broken gadget free. Heaven forfend! He wants to sell you either a new one or a new part. And he wants to keep on selling you!

Sure, the manufacturers of this nation, especially the big ones - - and they are the offenders, not the conscientious little mechanic in the local tin shop - - will scream at us, and denounce us. They (if we were stupid enough to mention names) would sue us. But it is absolutely true - - you are being taken for every buck these designing (no pun intended) gentlemen (pun intended) can squeeze out of you.

Let's look back at the early days of this progress! Scientists told us then that with the advent of this progress, man's work day would be shortened, his wages raised, his standard of living raised, and where one primitive wash

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machine cost $45.00, the washing machine of tomorrow would be a mechanical marvel, produced at terrific speed in almost automatic plants, for *half the price*. They knew they were lying. They knew that science *could* perform these marvels, but that Dollar Bill would never let them. Today, poor suckers, you should be able to buy a wash machine for $25.00. The man hours that go into making one are cut in half. The materials are cut, also (by making a formerly solid part hollow, by using clever twists and folds to make a flimsy part as rigid as a non-flimsy part, and by many other shortcuts). But today's wash machine costs from two to ten times the water-powered wash machine grandmother used.

Sure, you women will say you would rather have this than use grandmother's machine. True, but, you *needn't!* You can still have this wonderful machine - - unless science *is* a sacred cow!

How do you know that those wonderful mechanical brains, which solve a problem in seconds that would take one man a hundred years to solve, haven't made a mistake? IF it is made as carelessly as your wash machine, one of those thousand of gears will have a burr on it that will stick, and throw the calculation off.

Ah! You say it isn't carelessly made! And all the wonders of the machines that control the hydrogen bomb, the giant bombers that carry them, the tanks and ships and guns and atomic submarines that we are building for war! Perfect jewels of construction and engineering and workmanship!

How you ARE being taken! The *good* things of this mechanical civilization of ours are not given to YOU! You get the shoddy stuff. To help you wash, you get gears stamped out by a clumsy machine. To kill you, you get gears precision engineered to a degree of accuracy and perfection impossible to improve. And no faulty part is allowed to slip into the finished machine - - it is discarded. But when a workman on a production line making your wash machine feels a burr on the gear it is his job to slip into place on the assembly, he doesn't discard it - - because he's on piecework. He sees only the dollar bill. And he sticks it right where you'll feel it!

In this great civilization of ours, the workman is a disgrace to all workmen. He doesn't even understand the machine he makes. The repairman you call in wouldn't know a burr if he saw one. He is a union man, drawing top wages, and he doesn't give a hang about your washing. It's his dollar bills he wants!

IF this scientific age of ours is so wonderful, why this discrimination *against* us? Why is a wonderful invention sabotaged between the inventor's creation of it, and the mass customer who buys it? Why must it be made in such haste, and so carelessly, that it is virtually worthless, and only a parody of the machine as the inventor constructed it in his working model? Why is it that once the machine leaves his hands, and is turned over to the mechanic, it is rendered but a crude imitation of the real thing? Why is it that we keep on hearing of wonderful inventions that would really give us poor suckers a break, but they are now "on the shelf" of some gigantic corporation, never to be used because they destroy an outmoded method and render it profitless?

Don't say it isn't true! Your editor hasn't bought *anything* recently, from a common hammer to a fancy oil-burner air conditioner furnace and an automatic dishwasher that hasn't promptly failed him. In money expended, we can say that in the past five years we've bought $5000.00 worth of these scientific gadgets - - and *not one* but was shoddy in one respect or another, and its wonderful potential stolen from it by some carelessness somewhere in con-

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struction, some devilishly stupid bit of designing. Take the hammer for an example. Time was, a hammer head was designed with a *taper* in the hole that held the handle. Then, when you drove in a wedge, the hammer was tight, and could not fall off. *Today;* because a tapered hole cannot be *punched* in it by a giant press, they are *not* tapered. Such a hole cannot possibly hold a hammer long, wedge or no wedge, *and the scientists who designed it know it won't.* Take the oil burner. It has an automatic control, which has "points" which burn out, become corroded. This set of points could be removable, and replaceable by a simple twist of the wrist, at a cost of perhaps ten cents. But no, the "control" is "sealed" and must be replaced by an entire new gadget (price $20.80). It is guaranteed for *one year*. It lasted one year and *eleven* days!

You'll pardon this editor. He rants too much about things like this. But he used to be a mechanic. A good one. He still can fix an electric dishwasher whose insides he never saw in his life, while the "mechanic" who charged $25.00 to come and fix it, left it in exactly the same condition he found it - - because he was too stupid, too unfamiliar with his own product, to know what *could* have been the part that was causing the failure. It was a burr on a small guide that timed the opening of the automatic cover, which sprang up when the washing was finished. Trouble was, it sprang up before the washing was finished, or not at all, and thus kept the operation repeating itself.

This failure of our vaunted civilization is a thing that is growing day by day. Its ultimate end is complete chaos. The truth of the matter is that we are still the "masses" and we're getting the "leavings", as usual, while *somebody* gets the drumstick. Every time I see a $3,000,000 airplane with USAF on it, with its wonderful machines inside it (take the hundreds of tiny gyroscopes as an example), I compare it to my electric dishwasher with its lousy rotor in it that spins like a drunken sailor. Take that gyroscope. When I was a kid, I got one for Christmas for a toy. It was a beautifully machined bit of plaything, perfectly balanced, practically unbreakable, and I used it constantly for years. Even the strings you started it with lasted for months. Last Christmas I bought one for my own son, remembering the pleasure it had given me, and I paid three times what that earlier gyroscope cost. The frame was a wire that was so soft it bent, it was not welded together, but the joint was held merely by the plating process - - and in fact, it was already broken in the box. It was cast, and the rough edges cut the hand, and the roughness extended to the bearings in which the wheel rode. The thing was off balance, wobbled, and could not attain speed enough to remain spinning for more than twelve seconds (my toy had spun for as long as two minutes). The spring broke on the second pull, and the toy was a thing of the past by Christmas afternoon. Could not the same gyroscope that goes into those fancy airplanes be sold as a toy for kids to enjoy? Would you rather pay $2.00 for a good one, than $1.00 for one that was *totally worthless?* Why was a totally worthless one ever manufactured? The *scientist* who designed the worthless one *knew* it was worthless. The manufacturer who made it *knew* it was worthless!

No, we haven't a civilization to be proud of. We have a world of dishonest men who have sold their own genius for a mess of pottage. We have a world of "excluders" who refuse to share the good things, but dispense for the mass of humanity only inferior products. That wash machine you brag about over your grandmother's is a wonderful invention, sure, but it is only 10% what it *actually could be,* because Dollar Bill stands

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The STEOGAR

By Russell Storm

Elija went up in a chariot of fire. Leyden, it seemed was doing something quite similar. It had something to do with a new kind of springtime - - and of men like gods.

"I don't like your attitude," the little man, Leyden, said bristling. "You act as if you thought I had stolen this instrument. I want you to know that I didn't. And I didn't come here to be accused of theft."

I could have told him that he had said the wrong thing, that it would have been better for him to have admitted that he had stolen the instrument that lay on the desk in front of us.

"Then how did you get it?" lieutenant-colonel Hannegan said. He was in charge of security at the installation. Hannegan was a big man. His voice was a cross between the growl of a surly dog and the snarl of a power saw meeting a knot in a board. The three of us were in my office.

"It was given to me," Leyden answered.

"Ah," Hannegan said. "Who gave it to you?"

"I don't know his last name," Leyden answered. "He comes over to my shop quite often but neither of us ever bother with last names." He was getting more irritated by the minute. I was getting more nervous.

"Do you know his first name?" Hannegan asked.

"No. But I know what I always called him. Doc. He always said, 'Just call me Doc.' That's the only name I ever knew him by. I'm sure he works here - - - What's the matter with you two guys anyhow? You're getting white."

I could have told him what was the matter with me and why I was getting white. It was only the *steogar* which he had brought with him - - - so innocently, as if he didn't know that any unauthorized human being caught even *thinking* about it was going to have to answer some very personal questions - - - it was the name he had just used. Just Call Me Doc Macfarlane.

Macfarlane never used his last name, or any of the degrees that went after it, he never admitted his erudition or the fact that he was one of the world's best mathematical physicists. Just looking at him, you would never have guessed that in his field he was not only Mr. Big but that he was also Mr. Big's big brother. We have over a thousand people working in this installation. Security is so heavy it's hip-deep to a tall Indian.

But we never needed any security for Just Call Me Doc Macfarlane. He looked so much like nobody that he would have been a good security risk inside the Kremlin. The Russos would have just put a broom in his hand and told him what to follow.

Doc Macfarlane was my boss. When Leyden came in with the *steogar*, Macfarlane was hot. He was not just red-hot or white-hot, he was sun-surface hot.

Doc was missing, AWOL, and he had been missing for over a week. Because he was missing, work on his project had come to a halt. Without him around to give us courage to face the unfaceable,

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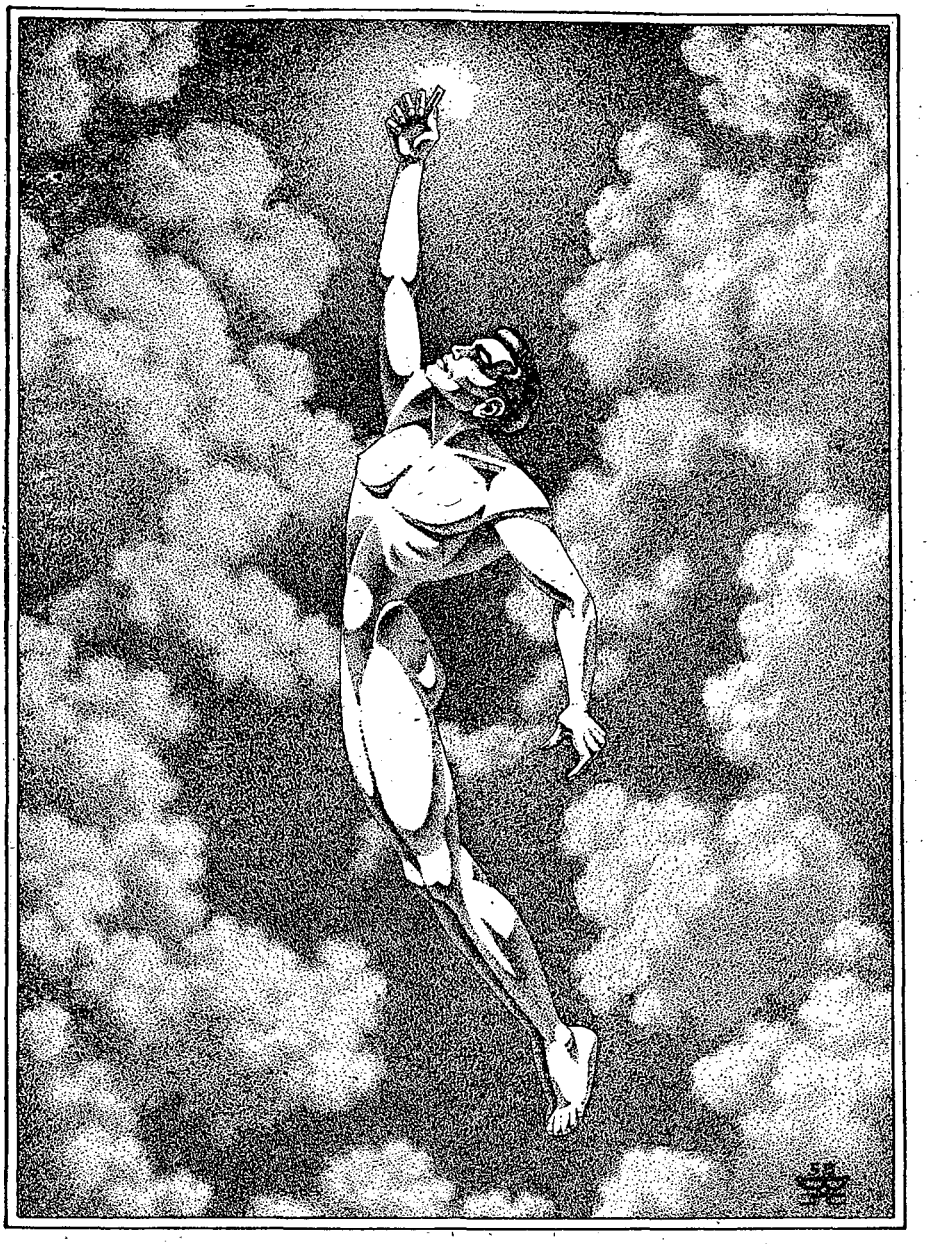

Leyden was shining bright as the sun as he rose . . .

we didn't know what to do.

The search for him was none the less frantic because it was secret. We hadn't admitted his disappearance to the newspapers and we had no intention of doing so, but we had admitted it to Security, and had asked help in finding him. Security was going nuts. For all they knew, or had been able to discover, Doc had walked off the face of the Earth.

To make matters worse, some drunken sheepherder had reported that he had seen a mysterious plane take off from the top of Green Mesa just at dawn of the night Doc had disappeared. The theory had been immediately advanced

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that Doc had been kidnapped by the Russians.

You never saw such a stir as this theory created. The rumor was immediately taken for fact. Our installation is located in desert country in the southwestern United States. If the Reds could come here and nab one of our top men, who was safe?

"What's wrong with you two?" Leyden repeated. "Now you're both getting green. All I did was to bring this instrument in, hoping to find Doc here."

"What do you want with Doc?" Hannegan asked.

"I want him to show me how to make this thing work. He gave it to me and told me it was a second model. He also told me a little about it. But something is missing - - -" A frown appeared on his face.

"Doc gave it to you? Hannegan asked.

"Yes. And I don't in the least like to have you two men act as if you think I had stolen it." The little man was getting indignant again.

"You don't like it?"

"No."

"What will you do about it?" Hannegan continued. He was deliberately needling Leyden to get an explosion of anger out of him, hoping to find out something.

"I'll just take the instrument and leave," Leyden said angrily. "I know how to make it work in part. It's only the very high frequencies that seem to be missing." Again he frowned and his anger at Hannegan was lost in the fret that rose from his inability to make the instrument function. Then the anger came back and he picked up the instrument. Tucking it under his arm, he said, "Good day, gentlemen!" The tone of his voice said that he doubted we were gentlemen. He turned toward the door.

"Are you going somewhere?" Hannegan said. If Leyden's tone of voice said that he doubted that we were gentlemen, Hannegan's tone said that he knew for certain that the little man was not going anywhere. No where at all.

"Yes," the little man said. "I'm going home. I'll work this problem out by myself." His back stiffened and he moved toward the door.

Hannegan opened his mouth to tell Leyden to halt . . . . and left it hanging open when he saw that he had no one to speak to.

The little man had vanished. He simply wasn't there.

The door opened. And banged shut as if someone were expressing his indignation by slamming the door behind him as he exited. But Leyden didn't go through it. I was there and I didn't see it happen.

For a long time, there wasn't a sound in that room. Then, slowly, I heard Hannegan start breathing. From the labored way he worked his lungs it sounded as if he needed air. Not until I heard him start did I realize I had also been holding my breath. Then Hannegan had the phone on my desk and was talking into it, giving Leyden's description to the guards at the main gate.

"Hold him when he appears and notify me immediately. Under no circumstances is he to be allowed to escape from this base."

We could hold Leyden on more counts than we could enumerate. In the first place, he had said he had seen Macfarlane. We could hold him on this charge, to find out what he knew. In the second place, he had the *steogar* in his possession and we had seen him with it. This was Doc's greatest project. He had developed and built it. He had also clamped a Security 9 classification on it. In case you know what that means - - - well, you're not even supposed to know that there is any such classification. Only key personnel, the scientists who are doing absolutely top-level research and who have cleared every loyalty test and have passed muster on every aspect

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of their personal lives are supposed to know about Security 9.

Hannegan and I sat there and looked at each other and waited for the gate guards to call back that they had arrested Leyden. I don't know which of us began to sweat first, but I think both of us knew the answer from the very beginning - - - that the guards were not going to arrest this little man. We waited an hour, to make sure.

Then Hannegan got slowly to his feet and took his departure. He didn't need to tell me that he would be back. I knew it. Not only was one of our secret instruments on the missing list but one of our top men was on the AWOL list. We had a minor problem with the instrument; we couldn't officially admit it was missing because we couldn't admit it had ever existed in the first place.

This did not apply to Doc Macfarlane. Since we could admit that he had existed, we could also admit that he was missing. At least to each other. Hannegan routed out every man on his staff and set them to work hunting for Doc - - - and incidentally for the *steogar*. Then he came back to see me, for more information.

The security chief came to see me because I was Macfarlane's assistant on this project. To Hannegan, this meant that I knew everything that had gone on, but what it actually meant was that I filled all of Doc's requisitions, did all of the heavy work, and knew next to nothing. Doc Macfarlane was my boss. I liked, admired, and respected him, but as to knowing what he was doing, nobody knew that.

"What is this *Project Steo* - - -" He squirmed himself into uncomfortable silence. Even with me, he could not bring himself to use the name of a device that had a Security 9 classification.

"It?" I supplied. I squirmed too, though for a different reason.

"Yes. Leyden had - - - ah - - - it. Can it be used to make a person invisible? Is this the purpose back of *Project Steo* - - - it?"

"I'm sorry," I said. "I can't tell you."

"Damn security!" Hannegan shouted. "Don't you understand that Doc is missing, maybe kidnapped, maybe dead? Leyden has it. I have a better chance of finding Leyden, Doc, and it too, if you will tell me what you know."

"I know Doc is missing," I said. "I want to find him just as much as you do." Something in the tone of my voice must have revealed my feelings for my chief. Hannegan shook his head, to indicate he had not meant what he had said. "And don't go damning security. It's not security that is keeping my mouth shut, it is the fact that I don't know what Doc was doing."

"But you're his assistant," Hannegan protested. "You've got to know." He still thought that security was shutting my mouth.

"But I don't know. Yes, I am Doc's assistant, but he doesn't tell me beans about what is going on."

"I find that hard to believe."

"I have found it hard to take."

"But surely Doc told you something."

I hesitated. Truthfully, Doc had told me many things, using me as a sounding board for ideas in the process of development. He had even told me his idea of *deitas* - - - of men becoming like gods. "He did not tell me what he was creating. I do not think he knew either."

Hannegan looked at me from under bushy eyebrows. "Um?" he said.

"Damn it, man!" This was one of the points that had been making me squirm all along. It was obscure, but important. "Ninety-nine per cent of Doc's work is pure creation. He is creating something, building something, developing an idea, translating that idea into a device. He is putting ideas and materials together in new ways. He doesn't know what he is creating - - - until he creates

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it. He doesn't know what will happen - - - until it happens. He doesn't know what he is doing - - - until he does it."

Disbelief was strong on Hannegan's face. I did not blame him for this. I would not have believed my own story if I had not known I was telling the truth.

"But Doc surely told you - - -"

"That he didn't know what he was doing. Hell, he didn't have to tell me that. He knew I knew it."

"But he gave you hints - - -"

"Plenty of them." Again I grew uncomfortable.

"Tell me what they were," Hannegan said eagerly. "Maybe we can make something out of them."

I twisted in my chair and my face must have revealed what I was thinking. Hannegan burst out. "Damn the security, Walter. We've got to find Doc."

"I wish I were as sure as you are."

"What do you mean?"

"I'm not sure that we've got to find him. I'm not sure that we want to find him. I'm not at all certain that he wants to be found."

Hannegan fell into a quick silence as he caught and misinterpreted the expression on my face. "Oh," he said in a lowered, sad tone of voice. "Like that, eh?" Pointing one finger at his forehead, he made a circling motion with it. I was not certain he meant Doc or me. "Too bad. Half of these so-called geniuses we've got on tap here have always seemed nuttier than fruit cakes to me." He must have let this slip without intending to say it, for he tried quickly to cover it up. "Enough of this. My job is to find Doc. And the - - - it. I want to know what hints he was giving you."

If the circling motion of Hannegan's finger had not included me - - - at least in my own mind - - - I would not have talked so freely. But I had to escape that threat. In order to do this, I talked freely, reasoning that it was better for Doc to be thought nuts than me. He had nobody to support, whereas I had a girl friend who was looking to me for her next honest dollar.

"It was his thinking about this vast springtime - - -" I said. Then I stopped, because I did not like the way Hannegan was looking at me. This was one reason. Another was the fact that I simply did not know how to put this concept into words that would be intelligible to him without risking permanent damage to his brain. Not that Hannegan was either dumb or unstable, but if the security men thought that us geniuses were unstable, we in our turn secretly suspected they were a trifle thick between the ears. "Doc thought that Spring was coming," I ended.

The expression on the security chief's face reflected internal pain. He looked out of the window, where the desert that had been brown all winter was now trying to burst with green, with yellow, and with pink as every single plant gratefully accepted the slight additional moisture brought by the early rains. The plants of the desert were eager for moisture, as avid for it as humans are avid for - - - what?

There was still pain on Hannegan's face as he turned back to me. The look in his eyes said that any fool could plainly see that Spring was coming.

"Doc didn't mean that. He was talking about a bigger spring, a vaster greening."

"I don't get it. Did he mean it would rain oftener?"

I sighed and thought harsh things about security men. "The spring of spiritual development in the human - - - being." I had started to say "human soul" but I caught myself in time. I am a scientist. I like to have referents for the words I use. What referent is there for the word *soul* except the *soul?* "I'm only telling you what Doc told me," I said. "And I warned you in advance that it would be difficult to understand."

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"This *steo* - - - was it supposed to produce spring in the human soul?" Hannegan asked. I wondered if he had read my mind. At any rate, he knew intuitively what I had started to say. He also knew the word. He and I shared the guilty knowledge that the word had no referent and that neither of us knew what we were talking about.

"Doc's idea went something like this: We have Spring on an annual basis here on Earth, a cyclical phenomenon. He thought there was another cycle of Spring - - - perhaps many cycles of it - - - a bigger cycle which involved a vaster meaning for the word than what we know."

As I spoke I could see that something about this idea appealed to Hannegan - - - as Heaven knows, it also appealed to me! I could see him begin to think. "How - - - how do you know when this bigger Spring is coming?"

"Doc thought that the quickening of the human spirit revealed its coming. He thought that it was a very subtle, hard-to-see event, but that if you looked close, you could detect it in the fact that men are becoming less suspicious of each other, kinder to each other, nicer - - -"

This did it. I could see the security chief turn on a boil. "Have you seen the morning paper?" he snapped.

"No."

"Then don't look at it. It's filled with murders and kidnapping and suicides and larcenies and every other kind of evil that men do to each other. That's the real situation." He was both angry and unhappy.

"Doc thought that this bigger Spring produces a very slight, but subtle effect on all men. It nudges them, very gently, in the direction the evolution of the species must take. But it doesn't force any man to go with it."

Hannegan shook his head. "You have to do more than nudge the crocks I know, you have to hit 'em over the head with a club. The *steo* - - - where does it fit into this?"

"It was a device designed to make it possible for any individual who possessed it to hasten his own evolutionary progress, to move into and upward with the bigger Spring."

"Is it a secret weapon?" Hannegan snapped at me.

"Hell, no!" I answered, startled. This thought had not even crossed my mind.

"The hell it's not! Leyden used it to become invisible. Can it be used to make a plane invisible? Can you imagine invisible planes flying over a city and dropping cobalt bombs that were invisible until they exploded?"

I shuddered at the thought. "Doc didn't have any such idea in mind - - -"

"How do you know what he had in his mind? Are you a mind reader?" Hannegan did not wait for me to answer. Rising, muttering to himself, he stalked out of my office.

The door opened again, then closed gently. Footsteps approached my desk. My back hair crawled. Ice cold air raced up my spine. I started to get to my feet. Pressure such as might have been caused by an invisible hand appeared on my shoulder, shoving me back into the chair.

"Just sit there," Leyden said, invisibly. "Don't move."

To tell the truth, I was completely paralyzed. Footsteps walked past me and into the rat's nest that Doc Macfarlane called his office. Papers rose from the top of his desk and hung suspended in the air, then were dropped to the floor. Other papers were jerked from the big pigeonhole. They hung in the air while my invisible visitor read them. Then one of the papers seemed to fold itself and to disappear.

"Thank you," Leyden said from the empty air in front of me. "I needed this formula. Now I know what Doc did."

Again I started to get to my feet.

"Sit there and keep quiet," Leyden said. I did not move until the door had opened and had closed. Then I snatched

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for the phone, and got Hannegan back into my office.

"Do I need to tell you that this whole installation is classified?" I asked him. "And that we can't have an invisible man coming in here and helping himself to material that has a Security 9 classification?"

"You don't need to mention it again," Hannegan said. This time when he went out of my office, he was running.

About midnight that night the security chief phoned me to say he had found Leyden. "We're waiting until you get here to take him," he said. I commandeered an official car and burned rubber reaching the address he had given me. He was standing in the street. I glimpsed enough security men to know that the whole block was surrounded.

"Leyden has a workshop in the back of the big white house directly ahead," Hannegan explained. "He is one of these home experimenters. He's in there now, working on something."

"What?"

"It," he answered. "I peeked through the window and he had the - - - it - - - on the workbench soldering new connections."

"What do you want me for?"

"When I arrest him, I want you to identify the instrument and to certify the security rating on it."

"Will do. But - - -"

"This time he won't get past me with his invisibility."

Calling his men, he had them circle the whole house and the small building at the rear. "I want you to close up ranks and touch hands as soon as you advance far enough. Form a tight cordon all around that workshop."

He didn't bother to knock at the workshop door. He shoved it open and we both entered.

Leyden turned startled eyes toward us. "Oh, hello," he said. Picking up the *steogar,* he turned a small knob projecting through the case, and vanished.

Hannegan stepped in front of the door through which we had entered. A second door opened at the far end of the shop.

"Close up your ranks, men!" the security chief shouted. "Don't let him get through you."

A moon was overhead. At Hannegan's yell, one of the cars parked in the street was pulled into the drive. The spotlight on it was turned on full power. The small backyard workshop completely surrounded by men standing shoulder to shoulder was clearly revealed.

Slowly, the circle of men began to move closer to the shack.

Something rustled overhead, making a sound like the wind whistling through the straw of a witch's broom. The circle of men came closer and closer. Nobody tried to crawl between the advancing legs.

In the spotlight, Hannegan's face got whiter and whiter. His eyes pleaded with me to say that Leyden in some way had managed to escape through that circle of men. I refused to cooperate. When the fact was forced home to us that Leyden was not in the circle, not in the workshop, and was not hiding anywhere in the backyard, Hannegan became intuitive.

"Next stop, Green Mesa," he said.

"Do you know what you are doing?" I demanded.

"No. If I knew what I was doing, I would go home and go to bed. And cover up my head," he added.

Green Mesa is a stretch of weathered table land over thirty square miles in area. It is big enough to lose a division of paratroopers on top of it. Almost completely without vegetation, only a few cacti, scrub oak and an occasional dwarf cedar manage to find a footing on it.

I don't know what stretch of optimistic imagination called this barren hunk of the devil's real estate Green Mesa, but this was the name it had. It was the rattlesnake's favorite home, though I

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never did understand how even a snake could manage to find a living on it. It was also a storage place for - - - but this item is in Security 9 classification. It is enough to say that this chunk of barren real estate was under guard at all times and that it was clearly marked MILITARY RESERVATION - NO TRESPASSING. Hannegan stopped at the main guard station long enough to check and see if anyone had been arrested for trespassing. No one had. He hadn't really expected it. The security chief collected a squad of men and a lieutenant to direct them, plus two snooperscopes.

"Do you expect to find an invisible man with a snooperscope?" I asked.

"No," he said, wistfully. "I don't really expect it. But it seems worth trying. Invisibility is a matter of bending light rays. Perhaps Leyden also bends light rays with the *steo* - - - with it - - - and perhaps - - -"

"I'll bet he bends more than light rays," I muttered. And wondered what I meant.

"We ought to have off-stage music," the lieutenant muttered, as we fumbled our way up that mountain in the moonlight, hoping no rattlesnakes were around. "It ought to be *A Night on Bald Mountain.*"

We didn't have any music unless you count the thin, far-off note of Gypsy violin that I kept thinking I was hearing. However, there were no Gypsies on Green Mesa and the note wandered in and out of hearing so erratically that I was never sure I was hearing it. The sound, or my thoughts about it, gave me the cold chills.

"This is like hunting for a needle that never existed in a hay stack that never was," I told Hannegan time and time again.

"I know. But Leyden is here, somewhere. We've got to find him."

"Why here?"

"Because this is where the drunken sheepherder swore he saw a plane take off, the night Doc disappeared," Hannegan answered.

"How in the hell you fit those facts together I don't see."

"I don't see it either. And shut up."

"But why can't we just alert the guards around this damned mountain and wait for morning? If he is here, they will pick him up as he comes down."

"Because he may not come down again," Hannegan said. This time I shut up without being told.

The moon and the stars swung overhead. A rattlesnake scared a soldier out of his wits. The snooperscopes found barren rock and lonely cacti and scrub oak. They didn't find Leyden. Dawn came into the sky.

It was one of those hushed dawns in early Spring when all of nature seems to stand on tiptoe waiting with bated breath for - - - well, for what? Maybe for the coming of Spring.

So far as humans were concerned, the dawn was very hushed. We were so chilled and so scared - - - of rattlesnakes, I kept telling myself - - - that we had to be hushed. All the time I was trying to tell myself that it was the snakes that were bothering me, I knew I was lying. I was worried about something else. And I was far more afraid it would *not* happen than I was afraid it would.

What am I talking about? I do not know. But some deep core in the heart of me was yearning for something to happen here on top of Green Mesa, in this Spring dawn, this core of me kept hoping that this was the year, the month, the day, and the hour, when it would happen.

"There he is!" a soldier shouted.

Did you ever see a man who is vibrating in every atom of his being? Did you ever behold a man who is so bright with light that he is shining from every molecule of his body?

This was what Leyden was doing.

Holding the *steogar* in both hands, he

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was standing with his arms outstretched as if he were offering the instrument to the rising sun. On a barren outcrop of rock, the highest point on this bald hill, he seemed to be extending the instrument which Doc Macfarlane had invented as an offering upon the altar of the dawning sun.

For an instant, both the startling beauty of the sight, and the utter impossibility of it existing in the materialistic world of the twentieth century, held us spellbound. This sight did not belong in the world of today. It belonged in the world of yesterday - - - or perhaps the world of tomorrow, when things known anciently are re-discovered. Then Hannegan spoke to the lieutenant and the officer ordered his men forward. No matter how beautiful this sight was, or how strange, the fact remained that Leyden was trespassing upon a military reservation. Stored within this hill was a cobalt bomb. This was the reason Green Mesa was so carefully guarded.

A running line of armed men, the soldiers moved forward.

The rays of the rising sun struck Leyden on the barren rock. There was a moment of complete silence. Then a wild violin note flooded the air, the same wild note I had been half-hearing during the preceding hours. Now it was a flood of sound, a pulsing, thrilling, vibrating note that was a symphony all in itself.

And Leyden himself was shining with a light as bright as the sun.

Shining as he rose.

In that hushed dawn, when all of nature seemed to stand on tip-toe waiting for the Spring, he was rising from the rock.

"He's like Elija! He's going up to heaven in a chariot of fire!" the lieutenant screamed, words that were rattling noises in the dawn on top of Green Mesa.

A small object dropped from Leyden. But he kept rising. He went, not only up into the air, but also up in frequency. Every atom in his body vibrated faster. And faster yet.

And faster still until the frequency was beyond the range of our vision.

Then Leyden was gone.

As he vanished, the wild violin note flooded the whole atmosphere with a tone of ineffable sadness - - - and ineffable sweetness. Like the notes from the flute of the Pied Piper of Hamlin when he piped the children of that wayward city after him, this violin note piped its hidden message to some resonating central core in all of us, calling to us to rise also and go with the rising man into the light of the dawn sun. Then the violin note was gone too.

The soldiers, the lieutenant, and Hannegan and me were all running toward the outcropping of rock; not to try to catch Leyden as he fell as a result of the failure of some weird anti-gravity experiment - - - deep inside of all of us we knew that he would never fall - - - and not to try to arrest him and hold him for a court martial for trespassing on a military reservation, but to go with him, if we could. The prayer in the heart of all of us was that he would take us with him.

The prayer was not answered. Leyden vanished. He remained that way, vanished as Doc Macfarlane had vanished. A sad and mystified group of men, we made our way down from Green Mesa.

Two days passed before I remembered the object that had fallen from Leyden's hands as he rose. He had dropped it because at that point he no longer needed it. Hannegan and I hurried back to the top of Green Mesa.

The object was there, in a clump of spiny cacti - - - the *steogar*.

The whole clump of cactus was in bloom. It is hardly possible to conceive that these thorned plants can be beautiful. But these were. Incredibly so. They had put forth blossoms of vast profusion. And in some sort of odd heliotropism - - - a turning of plants toward the light

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- - - every bloom had turned toward the *steogar*.

This was the only clump of cactus blooming on Green Mesa.

This clump, and this clump alone, seemed to have caught the meaning of - - - some vast springtime. Like brides coming forth from their chamber, they had arrayed themselves in full splendor.

Hannegan and I hurried back to my office where we opened the *steogar*. There we discovered that while it must have continued to function for a few minutes after it had landed - - - long enough for the cactus to catch the implications of its frequencies and to respond to the whisper it sent forth, it had burned itself out later. The inside was a fused mass of wiring.

I'm trying to rebuild it. I'm a fool to think I can do it, but I hear the whisper in the wind, see the shining in the sunrise, feel the message from the stars - - - and I've got to try!

THE END

Editorial . . .

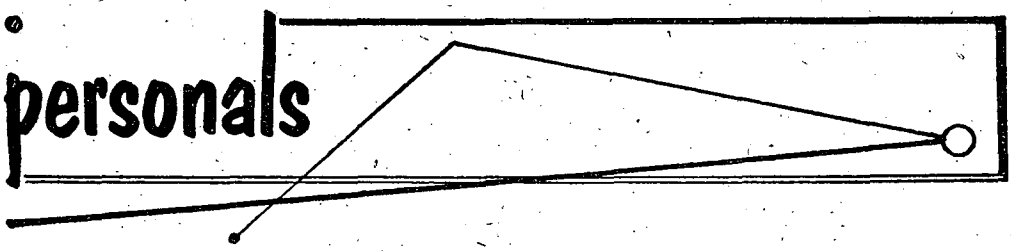
(*Concluded from page* 18)

between us and true science.

There is only one answer . . . we've got to start complaining. We've got to start boycotting the shoddy product. And the only way we can do it is to *point out* the shoddy product. Make a point of telling your friends the brand name of a product you bought and which proved to be a cheat. Only don't say it where the manufacturer can prove you said it - - because he'll sue you for damages. *HE*'ll sue YOU! The damager suing the damaged!

Civilization has regressed since 1901 to an unbelievable degree: today an honest man is a rarity. It'll take more than Diogenes and his lamp to find them! We've got the gadgets, but we haven't got the character. And you can't have one without the other! (As events *will* prove!) .....*Rap*

THE END



Garrett B. Edgar, 20 Filbert Street, Forty Fort, Pa., who is 21 years old, light brown hair, eligible, interested in jazz, popular music and light classics in addition to science fiction wishes to correspond with other fans, especially female . . . . *Wanted: Any books, magazines, pamphlets, etc, with material by E. R. Burroughs, H. G. Wells, Sax Rohmer, A. C. Doyle, Jules Verne, or H. R. Haggard. Willing to pay cash. Please state condition, price, and issue/edition /copy. Eddie Robinson,* 3005 *Arlington Ave., Riverside, Calif* . . . Wanted: June issue of Infinity with all the stories complete. R. D. Horn, 818 Mildred Ave., Lorain, Ohio . . . . 124 *sf books by Merritt, Burroughs, etc., for sale. John Vollert, 676 Market St., Patterson, N. J.* . . . . Robert R. Barrett, 2040 Salina, Wichita 3, Kans. wants "The Lad And The Lion" and "Back To The Stone Age" by Burroughs . . . *Wanted: The Bok and Finlay portfolios. State year in which published, condition, and what you'd consider a fair price. Marvin Bryer,* 1396 *Hamilton, Apt 7, St. Louis* 12, *Mo.* . . . Wanted: Physical Fitness Workbook by T. K. Cureton. Will pay full price. Query first. R. Harker, Jr.,

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191 San Juan Dr., Hollister, Calif.

The 14th World Science Fiction Convention is to be held on August 31, Sept. 1-2-3 in New York City. Interested fans should send $2.00 membership to World Science Fiction Society, Inc., P. O. Box 272, Radio City Station, New York 19, N. Y. Help make this the biggest convention ever by getting your membership in early! . . . *For Sale: Complete collection of New Trend E. C's, Weird Science, Weird Fantasy, Incredible Science Fiction, Mad, and all the others. Write for list now, because old rare copies are going fast. I may trade for stf mags and books. Billy Meyers, 102 Sequoia Drive, Chatanooga 11, Tenn.* Wanted: Feb. 1956 issue of S-F Quarterly. Also cover for Groff Conklin's anthology, "The Treasury of S-F". R. L. Horn, 818 Mildred Ave., Lorain, Ohio . . . . *Wanted: Will pay reasonable prices for Doc Savage magazines circa* 1933-39. *Please send list. Also need early EC comics. Will pay or trade assorted comics vintage* 1940-*up. For Trade or Sale: Early cardboard covered comics of* 1930-31 *for any of the above wanted items. Ted E. White,* 1014 *N. Tuckahoe St., Falls Church, Va.* . . . Wanted: Books and mags on Astronomy (technical), Astronautics (space travel), and Lithuania, also various indexes and fanzines, esp. "Why NYC shouldn't get a World Convention" and Fantasy Times and Vol. 1 of Opium Tribune. E. R. Maskys, 723 A 45th St., Brooklyn 20, N. Y. . . . . *I would like to hear from fans who can give me details on Edgar Rice Burroughs' career as a war correspondent, giving, if possible, islands visited, routes followed, and number, titles and dates of published stories. Am also interested in personal anecdotes about the author and stories about the making of the Tarzan movies. John Harwood,* 73 *Rounds St., New Bedford, Mass* . . . . The National Fantasy Fan Federation, which is the oldest fan club still in operation, and comprising fans from all over the U. S., Canada and the rest of the world, is aiming at a goal of 400 members. Here is an excellent chance to join a club to meet people with the same interests, namely science fiction, and to learn something about the rest of the peoples of the world. Besides offering opportunities for correspondence, the club, through its manuscript bureau, will place stories and articles in many of the fanzines published. Write for additional information (of which there is a lot!) to Neil I. Blumenson, 1475 E. 5th St., Brooklyn 30, N. Y. . . . . *Auction: I have the Shaver Mystery Magazine, Vol.* 1, *No.* 2, *II Nos.* 1, 2, 4; *III Nos.* 1, 2; *plus experimental issue. FATE, vol.* I, *Nos.* 3, 4; *II Nos.* 2, 3, 4; *III No.* 1 *OTHER WORLDS, Vol. I, Nos.* 1, 2, 3, 4; *IV Nos.* 2, 3; *AMAZING STORIES* 1944 *No.* 12; 1945 *Nos.* 6, 9, 12; 1946 *Nos.* 2, 6, 7, 8, 12; 1947 *Nos.* 1, 2, 5, 7, 9, 10, 11; 1948 *Nos.* 2, 6, 7, 8, 12; 1949 *Nos.* 1, 7, 9, 11; 1950 *No.* 1. *FANTASTIC ADVENTURES.* 1946 *Nos.* 5, 7; 1947 *Nos.* 3, 10; 1948 *Nos.* 3, 12; 1949 *No.* 6 *AMAZING QUARTERLY* 1948 (*March- April- May*). *FANTASTIC QUARTERLY, same issue as Amazing. All issues except FATE and OTHER WORLDS pertain to Shaver Mystery. Auction will close* 15 *days after this issue hits the stands. D. Kier,* 370 *East* 33*rd St., Eugene, Ore.* . . . Wanted to trade: Mags pbs, hdc books for others or things to trade. Frank Bergquist, 5 North 3rd Ave, Marshalltown, Iowa . . . *Large number of science fiction magazines and books, Popular Mechanics, Mechanix Illustrated, Science and Mechanics, Popular Science, as far back as* 1939. *Write me giving your wants. Vernon Everett,* 3813 *Conduit Ave., Baltimore* 11, *Md.* 1956 Westercon, Hotel Leamington, Oakland, Calif., June 30 and July 1. Guest of honor, Richard Matheson. Send your membership ($1) to Westercon, 432 23rd Ave., Oakland 6, Calif.

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The TIMELESS

James Canfield found himself made young again, with a whole life before him—but as another man! It isn't easy to live somebody else's life, but Canfield adapted himself to the incredible role—until he found out about the GORKEN! Then his new life became a thing of terror that might last a hundred years, or a hundred days. He hadn't been told how long his new youth would last! And to make it worse, he was now the potential gateway into his universe of a fantastic being from . . . another dimension? What WAS the Gorken? Human . . . or just —IT? There was a girl, too. Was he supposed to love her, or hate her? He didn't know! And one slip was a sentence of death. And who was Picozzi—and THE ONES? How could he succeed in such an incredible masquerade! More, how could he reach into another Time and another Space, to kill a creature who was ABSOLUTE MASTER of an enslaved world three hundred years from now!

THE DAY WAS the quixotic sort, half-gloomy, half challenging. Overhead, a trio of strato-racers dipped low and fled to the horizon in a twinkling. James Canfield eyed them and sighed.

This was one of those afternoons, he thought, when the beckoning vista of freedom becomes super-alluring. You fight the wish to go tilting at windmills. You turn away reluctantly from damsels in distress, if any.

For this is the twenty-first century. Mankind is in a rut. The battles are fought. The last kings are deposed. Old age creeps up, insidiously. Soon, the contest is won - - - and there awaits only the place *where none do embrace.*

The sun was a cold, red, dismal ball in the lonely sky when Canfield stepped off the moving belt at his home in a New Harvard suburb. He wondered, vaguely, if Marilyn would be in a nagging mood. That would be fine - - - a quarrel, when his voice was already hoarse from the two-hour long lecture he had delivered on *Cybernetics versus Religion.*

Who appreciated knowledge? For thirty years - - - or since his last adventure as an intelligence captain in the Atomic Wars of the late 90's, Canfield had devoted his life to the pursuit of knowledge. He had followed a schedule of learning as rigid as an army training program.

Now, for the first time, doubts assailed him. Was culture worth it? Wasn't life also a thing of flesh and blood? Didn't it include room for Marilyn and what she meant to him?

Well, here was home. Canfield dragged himself up the immobilized house walk. A beam-controlled panel slid aside for him in the outer walk.

The blue glints of the parlor soothed his eyes, as he stepped into the rambling L-shaped residence. The house was a squat poured structure that merged with the pine-studded landscape and rock outcroppings.

He looked about for Marilyn. She

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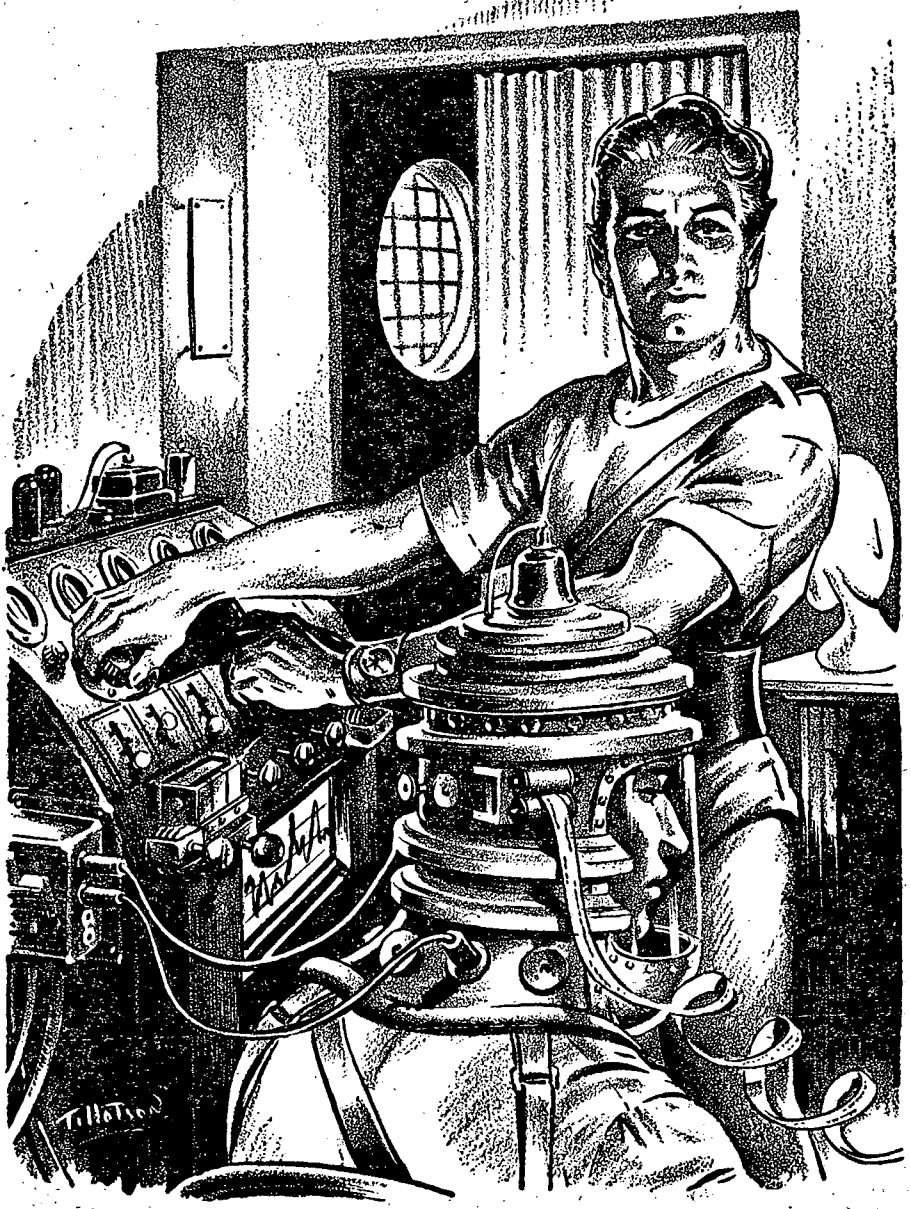
MAN

By Roger Arcot

Book I of an 87,500 Word Novel

Picozzi fitted the grim-looking metal cap over his head, then slumped unconscious. A voice began speaking: "Canfield, I speak to you from 300 years in the future . . ."



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was not to be seen.

He called her name.

The vocal summons energized the machinery of the house. The room circuits flared into life. A house robot came out of its niche in the laminated wall and stood watching for a moment.

The android's scanning discs brightened. From its smooth-sculptured features emanated an announcement in chill metallic tones: "No one at home."

"What!"

"The mistress has gone."

"Gone?" Canfield's brow knit in puzzlement. "Where? What's been going on - - - ?"

The robot responded with silence. Evidently, it was not keyed to answer the question.

Canfield's irritation grew. He hated the presence of these soulless automatic creatures that he discussed so thoroughly in the abstract in the classes.

"Come on - - - out with it, damn it all! Surely, she left a message - - - ?"

The house servant wheeled slowly. "I am instructed to tell you to look above the visiscreen, sir - - - "

"Damned thing!" Canfield muttered under his breath. "Damnable evil of mass production! Sloth for the matriarchs - - - " He turned, his face purpling, and strode into the glass-brick living room.

Above the video receiver, Marilyn had posted a note for him, auto-typewritten in script letters. Cursive writing was a dying art - - - and she had never learned it.

Canfield's blood pressure arose in alarm. *If she had done it, again - - -*

He snatched away the note and proceeded to scan its simple words, couched in the new and easier phonemes. A new twinge of anginal agony caught him, as the brunt of the message's import sank through his defenses.

Marilyn had flitted off on another spree of legal infidelity.

The note said:

I've had it. You're a laugh, but suddenly I lost my sense of humor. Your money just isn't enough and your name doesn't rub off so atomic. So Marilyn's found a new playmate and we're going to make moon music. Try the courts if you don't like it - - and I'll be viewing you.

Marilyn

There was more, of course, but that was the substance of it. A scathing missive of denunciation and jeers. On the opposite page, she taunted her buromate with the name of the healthy young moonship pilot whom she'd chosen. Not to mate legally, of course; just to share her self-awarded release from monogamy.

Was that in the statutes, Canfield asked? In the rules? In the contract? His whole frame commenced to tremble in anger.

He sat down, weak, to think it out. How swiftly the world moved in this insane era - - - and how strange people acted! This era so blighted of minds - - - and he recalled the great sanes of the past century, Schadiel, Oppenstein, Camus. Their dire warnings had been forgotten in the shuffle towards darkness.

Again, he shuddered.

He reminded himself how only a few short months had passed since he had suffered from an emotional plague of his own - - - a romantic madness so virulent it had almost shorted out his entire rational brain.

The end-result had been his buromating to Marilyn, a blonde nubile girl, clever as a hunting leopard and sleek as a show cat. Marilyn - - - who was fifty years his junior, but had forgotten more about love than he had ever learned.

What was it she had wanted from him? The prestige of his name? The

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luxury of his fortune? Or, the sadistic pleasure of torturing him? No one would ever know, short of draining the depths of her soul with a psycho-probe.

Canfield recalled how his colleagues had turned from him in disgust. Manning for instance, the topological expert. "Juvenophile!" he had sneered. Then there was old Schmitt, whose radiation-scarred face had kept him a bachelor all his life. "You should have bought your fun in the pleasure blocks," he had said. "Even so, you would have disgraced your profession less."

All of them had mistaken his autumnal love for senile lechery. Now, the prospect of facing them was intolerable. Yet, if he couldn't turn to his friends, where else could he turn?

The answer was clear. *Nowhere.*

He whipped himself with self-reproach. To think that in his doddering delirum, he had fancied he could mock the calendar. Shades of Thorne Smith, and the porno-venders of Vegas! He had actually believed he could carve his life into an idyllic new pattern. He could match himself against the frenzied instincts of a female-dominated generation and win out, he had thought.

Why? Why? Why? All the time he knew why. In his forty years of search for knowledge, he had been so lonely - - - and the anodyne to that loneliness had seemed to be found at last in Marilyn's cultured mind.

But he had not reckoned on the well-packaged allure of her body - - - and the gratification it provided her young friends.

Finally, Canfield forced a wry chuckle from himself. One could not say that the search for wisdom was not unending, anyhow. He knew, too well, the very opposite.

In his seventy-third year on Terra, he had plumbed deep into the layers of meaning surrounding certain old Anglo-Saxon axioms. And he had found truth in all of them. There were fools, everywhere, and greater fools around them - - - but the greatest, anywhere of course, were the old fools.

A clicking whirring sound and the pungent odor of electricity arcing penetrated his revery. Canfield lifted his head. He saw that the house robot, its gleaming shell-like body vibrating slightly under the soft diffused light, had followed him. The creature now stood a pace or two away.

"Well - - - ?" the master snapped. He was no 'cybernut' to adore machinery. Marilyn had been the one who wanted servants. They crept about you, listened, recorded information, thought their formless thoughts.

"When will you want dinner?" the metallic voice asked. A cog, a wheel, a relay moved somewhere inside the mechanism, perhaps in that part guarded by the android's breastplates. The robot reached a complicated decision. "Shall I divide the portions in half, sir?"

"Yes - - - by all means!" Canfield growled. "Let us be economical - - - rational." His eyes flashed. "Just how long has she been gone?"

"Since you left for classes. Since eight hundred, in fact - - -"

"You could have called me. I don't work at the North Pole."

The robot's voice sounded almost pained in answer: "I'm only a house butler."

"Oh, sure," said Canfield, crustily. "I forgot." He knew the automaton servant meant that he was equipped only to record incoming messages to the home, not originate outgoing calls. Even a positronic brain had its limits . . .

"You might as well prepare a meal for one," the professor directed, wearily. "This is too much to solve in one night."

"Yes, master."

"Don't serve it right away, however - - - wait until I ring. I've got some problems to mull over - - - and some contacts to make. I may deenergize the house tomorrow."

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"As you wish," the house robot returned, displaying no reaction to this threat of annihilation. It headed toward the electronic kitchen.

TWELVE HOURS LATER, James Canfield rose from hypno-sleep. He glanced at his chrono-dial and thought: *The philosophers are right. In the face of mental obstacles of inhuman complexity, a certain nightmarish hour never fails to knock for all men. An hour when each must recognize that he has come to grow old.*

This morning, the deadly hour had knocked. Here was the last of life for which the first was made, as the poet said. But, it had settled on the soul as bitter as wormwood. It stunk.

The gray dawn made an aura of gloom around him, as Canfield got up and stumbled into the lavatory. He peered at his seventy-three years in the glass and groaned. What chance to survive in a world where adventure was reserved to so few?

His hair was thin and bleached; his skin slightly mottled. His chin sagged like a water-logged awning. His right hand shook with palsy as it wielded an old-style suction razor on tough-film-smeared whiskers.

Only his posture was still military and erect. It, alone, preserved a memory of the sort of man he had been forty years earlier - - - back in the days when his theories on the nature of the universe had first electrified the intellectual world.

A glint of early sunlight penetrated the translucent airscreen of the bathroom. Canfield sighed. He directed another glance of loathing at his senescent image in the blue-tinted cross-angle mirror.

Following his evening meal the night before, he had done much checking and re-checking. When all the information he had amassed was finally laid out before him, it had looked about as pretty as a holocaust.

Marilyn had shot the works. For one thing, she had left the household in complete dishevelment. An observer would have thought a small nuclear bomb had imploded between the walls.

Of her personal possessions, she had allowed nothing to remain of particular value. She had frenziedly packed her bright lustrous dresses and sheer plastilite bedgowns, her radiant lunar jewelry, even her vial of hypno-rest tablets.

Then, she had gone through the town like a whirlwind - - - even to cleaning out their joint tele-checking account at the autobank. Finally, she had raced off to freedom in the new jetmobile Canfield had so unwisely registered in her name.

He had been taken.

Wiping the last smear from his cheeks, Canfield again vilified himself: Fool! Fool!

At that moment, relief came to his tormented mind. Relief from the intolerable pressure. Surcease from the pain.

A germ of a thought presented itself, conjured subconsciously by ten billion cells trained to relentless logic.

Run away, Canfield! Escape!

A light broke in his brain. Circuits meshed, closed through a thousand cerebral relays; neurons stirred into life; sluggish adrenals suddenly flowed in stimulus.

All was not lost.

There was a solution. However, it would not be found in the courts. There would never be any escape, he reflected grimly, in those ghastly corridors of robot-administered injustice. They were dominated by the matriarchal politicians.

No, rather, a man could flee into limbo. He could bury himself in the nation's great submerged population, two hundred and fifty teeming millions of them!

Then, let the authorities find him if

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they could!

And later, he might wander south to take refuge in the democratic realms of the Latin Belt.

James Canfield felt as if he had at last struggled free from the emotional virus which had invaded him and robbed him of will for so many months.

His brain snapped into action, functioning in the cold and precise manner of an analog computer. Schopenhauer had the right idea. Men should be free.

A new Canfield - - - an entirely reconstructed personality - - - emerged from the dual struggle. Dominating his ego was a vow that henceforth he, alone, would control the thin skeins of his existence.

Immediately, he began making plans how best to escape. One scheme soon stood out from the others - - - a scheme that could be machined into steel-clad perfection. His hurt angered mind reveled and a sardonic chuckle - - - long missing from his weakened traits - - - manifested itself deep in his throat. This was not revenge, he thought. He was far past the age when revenge appealed - - - and he had never been deliberately vindictive. Rather, what he was doing appealed to his sense of humor. A cosmic joke that played tribute to his meager role in society throughout the past years.

AFTER THE HOUSE ROBOT had served him breakfast, Canfield put through a number of visiscreen calls. The first was beamed to New Harvard to report that he would not be able to meet his classes - - - neither that day nor possibly, the next few days, either. He had no intention of letting them know he would never return.

The second communication went by strato-relay direct to Canfield's broker at Finance City.

In a few seconds, Brady's fat image materialized on the screen. The investment specialist, living in a world hamstrung by regulations, yet goaded by pressure, looked even more harassed than usual.

Canfield told him, "I want to sell out. How soon do you think we can clean up my holdings?"

"You've been cocking an ear to lousy rumors again, professor," Brady answered. "Since Lucevelt got the ax, the country's solid - - - women or no women. The market's as firm as Mount Whitney. Hell, if you unload now - - - "

" - - - the way I hear it, the market's as sky-high as Pikes Peak, too. Especially my blue chips. I need my money, Brady."

The broker sighed. "You're the sucker. I'll dump whenever you say."

"I say, let's make it today," Canfield replied, flatly.

"Will do. Oh, brother, you'll hate yourself in a month. You could take out another ten thousand credits - - - "

"Who's greedy? No, thanks - - - just transmit the check to my home. Tonight . . . if you can. Should I decide to reopen, you'll hear from me."

Brady nodded. His image faded from the visiplate.

The third, fourth and fifth succeeding calls were beamed over tight-wave secret channels to certain criminal elements of the metropolis.

Had they suspected he was even aware of these groups' existence in the city, Canfield's campus colleagues would have been shocked. And also, enlightened. The scientist's acquaintanceship with the operators in this fringe rested on a fairly slight, yet not too insubstantial basis. He had contacts; he was willing to spend whatever money was needed to gain the ends he now had in mind; and money - - - he had learned - - - unlocks almost all doors.

On the fifth call, the recipient refused to let himself be seen. A scrambler was set up on the wave and the receiving screen in Canfield's living room remained black. The channel transmitted

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only the audio portion of the communication.

"Yeah?" a person growled at the other end.

Canfield cleared his throat. He fumbled for words. "My name is Brown. You were recommended to me, once - - - "

"So *you* say."

" - - - by an operative in the intelligence corps. It occurred to me - - - ahem - - - that you might be interested in - - - "

"Did you say 'recommended'? Who in hell's going to recommend me in the government - - - ?"

"Perhaps, I should have said your name was referred to me. It was dropped in conversation. Don't get me wrong. I just happened to be around on temporary duty - - - "

"You mugs make me sick," the bodiless voice said. "What's all that got to do with me?"

"I want to buy assistance."

"Who doesn't? But you - - - a government man! What's the matter? You rockery - - - or something?" The exclamation was followed by a loud roar of laughter. "Don't schliemiel me. I wasn't born in the last century."

"I was," Canfield snapped. "And don't jump to conclusions. I'm in no way connected with the present regime. I want to buy a favor."

"I'm listening."

"When the matriarchs came in, they kicked a lot of us out of our commissions - - - superannuated, they called us. At present I'm . . . well, a sort of instructor - - - "

"Put your cards on the table, Canfield," the voice suddenly interrupted. "I just had your call traced."

"All right. I want a new face."

"What makes you think I can give you one."

"I happen to know you can," was the blunt reply.

The voice chuckled. "It'll cost you, my friend. Grease all the way down the line."

"I can afford it."

"Okay - - - you've nearly made a deal." The wavering geometrical patterns on the scrambled screen vibrated slightly. "Give me twenty-four hours. I've got to safeguard myself. No offense, but you might be a spy - - - and I'll have to check. Incidentally, if you turn out to be a right number and want to skip the country, I can arrange that, too - - - "

"It won't be necessary for awhile," Canfield returned. "Thanks - - - and goodbye." He pressed the release button and broke off the visicall.

BY EVENING of the next day, James Canfield's plan to launch a new life for himself was almost complete.

Marilyn might come crawling home, now. In fact, Canfield figured the errant round heels probably would, once her insatiable little libido was cooled. But what a surprise would await her. She would find the pattern of her own life had changed irrevocably. The Dormouse had fled.

No longer would the pneumo-mail deliver staggering bills for Canfield to pay. He groaned as he thought of the duns for platinum-lame gowns, skylon swim-suits, exotic lingerie, and other items with which Marilyn adorned her sleek lovely body.

No longer would she get to revel in expensive boudoir perfumes. Golden-jeweled earrings, bracelets with tiny visi-screen receivers, wraps of duplicated mink, a hundred other trinkets, they were all out, too - - - unless the moon pilot packed a fat wallet. Marilyn would miss all those feminine luxuries she worshipped with every beat of her avaricious heart.

Nor would she rate any more costly vacations in the sun-conditioned playspheres of Biloxi, St. Jovite, Bar Harbor.

And above all, there would be no

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chance for her to employ irritant tears and buro-endorsed kisses to erase the memory of infidelity. Her wiles, her amorous play upon an elderly spouse's fancy, would be of no avail - - - against three thousands miles or more of distance.

No, when she came home, reeking with youth, confident that she could win out with the seductive power of her hungry eyes and the beguiling appeal of her custom-built body, she would encounter her first failure. The dwelling would be empty; the infatuated scientist to whom she was legally bound nowhere to be found.

In fact, she would find a residence so empty it would appear never to have been lived in. Even the house robot would have been returned to the factory, where its memory of past events would be erased from its brain.

What then? If Marilyn, panic-stricken, should hurry by copter or jet-mobile to the campus, she would again face an unanswerable mystery. The university officials would inform her - - - truthfully - - - that her husband's whereabouts were not known.

What would she do next? Check the monorails, the underground tubes, the metropolitan hotels? Again, her search would prove hopeless.

Even if she finally notified the matriarch police corps, itself, that efficient body would be just as hard-put to unearth any record of James Canfield's continued existence.

Eventually, Marilyn—would discover that for all practical purposes, her buro-mate and what remained of his fortune had disappeared from the face of the earth!

But, life would not have stopped for him!

THE transformation was swift.

In the course of its completion, forty-eight incident-crammed hours passed in short order.

Now, the moment of James Canfield's deliverance lay only thirty minutes in the future. His excited heart was ticking off the tense seconds until the rocketplane to Los Angeles, due at that time, should blast off from New Harvard stratoport.

He was seated in the space terminal cafe, holding down a booth that was inconspicuous only by contrast with its gaudier neighbors. It was upholstered in bright leopard skin.

Soft music tinkled from Canfield's micro-radio band. His newly flattened nostrils quivered sensitively to the odor of spiced foods and the faint exotic scents worn by many women.

He sipped at a demitasse of syntho-coffee, while he regarded the other helmeted travelers about him with alert interest. Some were clad in conventional one-piece suits of soft colors. Others wore the current fad of crimson blouses and knee-length breeks of yellow skylon.

The pressure and liveliness of the scene crowded Canfield's brain. Alien traffic swarmed by in endless flow, humanity in the mass, confusing and dazzling - - - yielding persistent retinal images.

The pupils of the runaway widened behind his tinted contact lenses. His eyes scanned a dozen faces in a glance. No one knew him. He might as well be invisible.

His ears then bent, unconsciously, to a score of jargon-packed conversations. The jerky popular speech prevailed among the people, swift as the clicks of metering machines and posed in varying nasal accents.

The whole terminal seemed to throng with vitaminized, energized personalities, the antiseptic bodies of modern mankind - - - the race of homo sapiens, as ever platyrrhine, restless, on the go.

They were like freed robots, stirred by all the desires promised fulfillment in the cloud-screen ads and colorcasts and yet conscious they would never at-

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tain the world of fleshly supermen.

Canfield drank it all in. For all the rational dynamo that hummed blue sparks in his protesting skull, he almost reeled in intoxication at this fresh contact with the frenzied world.

He felt the change manifest itself even in his own personality. He was not James Canfield; he was Oliver Brown, traveler, man from nowhere.

His chest, padded slightly to simulate muscle where there had been some droopy flesh, was almost inclined to swell with pride at the super-civilized condition attained by America, female government or not.

Yet even here, traps were lurking. Only a moron could fail to foresee the dangers to ultra-thinking and free will that were inherent in a soft-muscled machine culture.

Nevertheless, he was stimulated. The new jangling state seemed to compensate somehow for the sacrifice of identity and friends which he had chosen to make.

It was as though undreamed-of adventures were presaged for him . . . as though thirty to forty years had been lopped off his decaying metabolism . . . *and he was young!*

But, he was not. He was old. The disguise made no difference. You couldn't efface the essential bleakness of outlook that came with the advanced years.

Funny, Canfield thought - - - his mind returning for a moment to his decision to launch a new life, how at first he had failed to attack his problem philosophically.

That was what came of living coarsely like a visceratonic somatotone, gormandizing your sybaritic world. You paid for it. You became a victim of a simple emotional syndrome, your reason blotted like a child's. Lord, who would have guessed, he reflected bitterly, that this lonely runaway had once been hailed as the most promising thinker of his era.

When the time came to mesh ideals with the real universe, to widen his threshold, he had skinned himself up as badly as Bacon and Russell had before him. Russell, who had once said unjokingly, that even the most prized bull owes his great value to the milk-giving qualities of the female cows in his ancestry.

Now that he was on the last lap of his dash to living oblivion, Canfield's reflective mind - - - with a few minutes of rest ahead - - - began reconstructing a brief history of his recent activities. Searching for mistakes. Plotting how to avoid them in the future, to keep his trail covered. His highly visual imagination created a kinescopic pattern of pictures based on all his behavior.

First, Brady had cleaned out the accounts for him, as ordered. The money was transferred. Canfield was a rich man, now.

A rich man and a different man - - - a change for which the underworld, in turn, had demanded heavy payment. Canfield had, after threading a devious route, reached the powerful man he had called by visiscreen. This overlord had brought him into contact with a certain lightning-fast facial surgeon who had made essential alterations in his new client's features.

"We'll flatten your nostrils and enlarge your cheeks slightly," the surgeon promised. "I'll also tatoo your eyes - - - but you'll still need contact lenses."

The operation was speedy and painful. In addition to the other changes, the professor sacrificed his distinguished white mustache and grizzled sideburns. His body yielded up by thermo-message some fifteen pounds of what was by-no-means excess weight.

Then, he had been referred to another skilled operator - - - a genius in criminal circles.

This person, an old crone with bluish circles under her faded eyes, had locked Canfield's hands inside an innocuous-

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appearing black box.

An electric knife then cut several layers deep into his anesthetized fingers and palms stripping off all vestiges of whorls, loops and other print identifications.

A glove of living flesh had been stretched over his hands like a new skin. The flesh formed a completely novel pattern of prints - - - a pattern that would be permanent due to chromosome-doubling.

After the transformation had been complete, Canfield had made it a point to ride the belt out to the University, there to stroll along the Hydroponics Gardens and across the Mall near the World War III Memorial.

Success had been his to taste and relish in this final and most acid of tests. He had been completely unrecognized by those cronies and students of his whom he had casually addressed.

Attention!

Canfield pricked up his ears.

So sudden was the transition from reverie, that he wondered if the command originated in his own brain. Similar suggestions had kept coming to him in recent days, as if a voice spoke inside him. But this was real - - -

Attention! The rocket from Lancaster . . . is now unloading at Gate Five. All westbound passengers holding tickets will kindly wait at the gate.

No longer was there any doubt.

James Canfield felt small relief at the knowledge. While the wall-com speakers continued to boom their announcement throughout the space terminal, the professor's mind stiffened to alertness. He felt an impulse to flee, an impulse that was swiftly counteracted by a reservoir of strength arising from his subconscious.

He had to carry it through.

He arose, a tall spare figure attired in an indigo-blue one-piece siren suit, summoned the waitress to his booth so he might pay his check, and then strolled out of the cafe.

In the pink-tinted corridor, he boarded the moving belt and was carried out to the ramp where the open air was brisk. Here, he would be sure not to miss his call.

Just as he joined the swarm of people milling against the shining bars of the gate, somebody jostled against him and a bony arm thrust into his ribs.

Canfield wheeled about, angered. He glared at his neighbor. The offender was a man whose age approximated fifty. His thinness made Canfield think, "That's the way I probably look to people now - - - tall but shriveled."

The thin man forced an apologetic smile. "Sorry," he said. "I got bumped from behind myself. Guess, I just ricocheted like a billiard ball."

A sense of *rapprochement* swept over Canfield. Who was this man? He looked undeniably familiar.

The runaway's mood grew into uncomfortableness. A flush crept over his forehead.

He turned away. "No harm done."

Almost immediately, he regretted the incident. Why register himself on other people's brains - - - for them to remember afterward. In the future, he decided, it would be smarter to swallow his ruptured feelings. Much smarter, than to fly off the handle and draw attention to himself.

An early spring breeze rippled across his face at that moment, cool and moist as it swept over the dazzling white apron of the stratodrome.

Canfield's body, robbed of blood and protective adipose tissue, shivered slightly.

Fighting off the chill, he turned his attention to the vessels parked off the runways. In particular, his eye swept over the powerful lines of the westbound rocket that had just landed. It shimmered vaguely beyond the meshed barrier, a gleaming metal ship with small vanes and stubby tail.

Soon, the rocket would lift above the

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drome and emit a roar like a thousand earth-freed devils - - - nosing upward to soar past the entire atmosphere. Behind it would trail a wake of liquid fire, falling in golden sparks.

There was no experience, Canfield supposed, that could ever equal that of plowing through space at thirty miles above the earth's green surface . . . *unless it was nosing through deep space, itself!*

The flow of descending passengers had ceased. Immediately, the anxious group of ticket-holders who were waiting surged forward to surround the boarding platform. Canfield was swept along.

Presently, a queue was formed and the passengers filed up the ramp steps to the gangway. At the top of the aluminum platform, Canfield came face to face with the line hostess and an officer of the plane, who were checking in the flight passengers.

The hostess, an extraordinarily pretty girl in silver harness whose blonde hair was rendered more piquant by its contrast to her blue-tinted eyebrows, marked off the name under which Canfield had booked the reservation: Oliver Brown.

"Welcome aboard, Mr. Brown," she said. She flashed a smile, baring small white teeth on one of which was capped by a small diamond. That was the current fad by which girls indicated they already had a pre-mating partner. Canfield sighed, inwardly. In his days, a wedding ring had been the only sign of the unattainable.

The girl was friendly, however. "We have another Oliver Brown coming on board," she said. "Which are you - - - the one from the Atlanta rocket?"

"I'm afraid not," Canfield answered. He tried to control his surprise at the revelation. "Another Oliver Brown? That is unusual."

"Isn't it? Perhaps, you might be long-lost relatives. I could seat the two of you together, if you wish."

"No, no. That won't be necessary." He shook his head. "It's not important - - - besides I prefer the rear of the plane. Anyhow, the world is full of Browns - - - "

"Yes, but not so many as there used to be. Not now, that the matriarchs allow girls to take their mother's names," the line hostess reminded. She smiled again. "The heck of it is, my mother's name was Hangworthy - - - so I chose to hang on to Pop's. In other words, I'm Miss Jordan."

Canfield acknowledged the introduction and plunged inside.

Turning to the left, he plopped down in a pressure seat near the tail of the rocket plane - - - always the most advantageous position in the event of a crash landing. Barring a vertical spin near take-off, of course.

Another advantage was the fact there was virtually no lateral wobble near the engines, such as made rocket-travel a sickening affair for the crew in the ship's nose. Here in the back, only the occasional deafening noise of the blasts acted as a real discomfort.

A few seconds later, another passenger came down the aisle, looking for a seat. He chose, finally, to sit down beside Canfield.

The professor turned to look his flight companion over, curiously. To his annoyance, he recognized the face. His compartment sharer was the man who had bumped against him inadvertently when they were caught together in the crush of the crowd around the gate.

The stranger's features were wrinkled like a distorted mask. Canfield wondered about that. His companion bore an agonized expression that could not be attributed altogether to "take-off" fear.

Yes, something was eating him. Here, Canfield thought, is either a sick man - - - or a very scared man. In fact, he seemed to have aged visibly in the very process of boarding the rocket.

Canfield's mind was intrigued. The

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possibility of a puzzle took his attention off his own worries - - - and here was a real puzzle, indeed.

If there was an answer to it at all, it suggested that the man suffered some rare organic ailment, one that involved psychosomatic reactions. Probably, it manifested itself greatest in moments of exertion or stress.

A klaxon screamed through the space vessel's cramped interior. Blast-off warning! Passengers obediently plugged their ears, lounged back in their pressure seats and allowed the vivacious line hostess to clamp them in for protection from the high initial acceleration.

The moment of flight began, gentle and deceiving at first. The vessel thundered down the runway with a swoosh of hot gases behind it. Then, it lifted under the thrust of assisting jets.

A second bell sounded. Canfield's nerves tensed. In a moment, he would be hammered under the full impact of the first rocket explosion.

Then, the universe split open for him! The fuel exploded with the kick of a million mules!

In the next fraction of a second, the slim shell of the rocket plane shuddered and nosed upward, leaping at a dizzying angle as if propelled by forces of solar magnitude.

Disrupted molecules screeched and roared as the blast reached its full frenzy. An inferno of noise - - - like a cosmic thunderclap - - - battered its way from the vessel's scorched stern and rolled through the ship. It devastated hearing and morale, alike.

The tugging rubbery grip of the powerful acceleration continued to mount and make itself felt. Canfield writhed. He suffered the hallucination that the transformed contours of his face had become transformed anew, turning to twisted fused plastic that suddenly froze. The flesh seemed to lay as heavy as lead upon the frontal bones of his skull, as if a permanent grimace had been stamped into his features. His alarmed heart pounded like a runaway turbine.

Gravity doubled and quadrupled upon itself, until the bones of every passenger felt as if they were being crushed between ten-thousand ton metal presses.

Despite the alleviation that was supplied him by the enveloping pressure seat, the blood in Canfield's tortured body virtually ceased to circulate. His age was against him - - - and the blood strove to pile itself up on the plus-gee side of his frame.

No wonder - - - he thought - - - that space travel was only for the young. His head rolled to one side in agony. Suddenly, his tormented brain blanked out.

CANFIELD ACHIEVED consciousness a very short time afterward - - - almost as soon as the acceleration dwindled, in fact. His first act upon opening his eyes was to glance out the port-window.

The rocket plane was cruising in a violet-blue layer of atmosphere, probably twenty-five miles above the surface. The air was so thin a man in a space-suit could have bottled vacuums in it. Yet, without a suit, he would have boiled to death.

Below, the vast expanse of western North America shone like a polished mirror under the glare of sunlight, making it resemble a convex bowl covered with microscopic mold. Cloud-globules, like pinches of white fluff, lay scattered over the wrinkled green terrain.

"Always looks different high up, doesn't it?" a rather strained masculine voice commented at Canfield's shoulder.

Canfield removed the earplugs the girl had given him. He would not need them until the next blasts.

"How's that?" he asked.

"Ever notice the way the ground

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pulls away from you - - - when you're still close to it?" Canfield's seat-companion continued. "Like it was shrinking through the wrong end of a telescope. Know what it reminds me of?"

"No."

"Makes me think of scooting over the landscape of Luna. Mountains, meteor craters, long valleys - - - all that - - - "

"Does it?"

"Except for the rivers - - - and the patches of vegetation, of course."

"I wouldn't know," Canfield responded, drily. He wished to avoid too much intimacy and yet at the same time, not give offense. "I'm afraid I've never been to Luna."

The speaker chuckled. "I neglected to mention - - - I was speaking of the satellite's far side. There's still some water vapor there you know - - - enough to allow a green mold to grow in the valleys. You could almost say the moon really was made of green cheese - - - " the man paused, while his face twitched, grimaced, " - - - couldn't you?"

"I suppose so."

"From the way I rattle on, your suspicion would be justified, anyhow, about me."

"All I figure is you've been to Luna," said Canfield.

His companion nodded, proudly. "Made it on the first tour open to the public. What do you think of that? Just squeezed under the age limit for space. I'm telling you, Brown - - - "

A chill coursed up and down Canfield's spine. "How'd you get my name?"

"Simple. It was on the seat scheme."

"Oh. For a moment, I couldn't understand it."

The stranger laughed. "Long time since you got around by rocket, huh? I thought something of the sort."

"Why?" Canfield asked, defiantly.

"Because of your age. Takes a lot of guts to risk your heart in high-G acceleration. I know."

"On the moon?"

"That was rough, too. Let me tell you though, I wouldn't have missed that trip if it lopped off twenty years from my life. When our group reached the Beta orbit, that's where they've got the landing satellite, we changed to a lunar landing craft. From then on, it was pioneering - - - sheer pioneering."

"I can imagine."

"It took us about six hellish hours to reach the surface. Brown, I walked around in pumice up to my knees. You - - - or anybody else - - - couldn't begin to imagine how long I'd looked forward to that moment, lived on against odds for that moment, hung on for that short hour and . . . oh God! . . . ohh! *Mother of God!* - - - "

Before the speaker could finish his thought, his words disintegrated . . . trailed off in stifled groans. His body doubled up, jacknifed in pain. His long arms suddenly hugged his heaving chest. It was quite apparent his heart was suffering excruciating agony.

Canfield watched, horrified.

A few seconds later, the stricken man appeared to rally from his attack. His mumbling tongue sought to complete the chain of thought it had started: "Marvelous experience . . . worth the pain! Worth the sacrifice, the millions! You can't imagine what glory, what gloriousness . . . to walk on the moon . . . climax of a man's dreams . . . "

The jerky sentence ended in a gurgle. " - - - a hundred years of dreaming - - !"

Canfield's desire for anonymity melted in the presence of the need to be humanitarian. The man was suffering - - - and Canfield's sensitivity was so great he suffered with him in empathy.

Overcome by his feeling of vicarious alarm, he decided to abandon his cautiously-mannered aloofness: "Look here," he said. "Something's wrong - - - let me help you. What is it - - - a heart attack? If you'd let me just go get the

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line hostess, we might - - - "

"No, no!" His companion raised himself up. His trembling fingertips clawed at the scalp where his hairline met his chalky furrowed brow. "Whatever you do, don't do that! I assure you, it's nothing too serious - - - "

"But damn it, you're in pain!"

"Pain? Shall we say, old age creeping up, rather," the stricken man said, hollowly. "But, it's passing. I'll be back to par in a few minutes. When I get to California, I've got a rush appointment with people who can help. There, at the clinic, they'll know what to do - - - "

"But, suppose you're unconscious by then," Canfield pressed. He was still trying to be helpful. "In that case, what? Perhaps, you'd better tell me what clinic - - - ?"

"Don't worry. I'm not going to black out again, my friend."

"You mean to imply, you've had these attacks before?"

"Many times."

"I guess you'll be all right, then," Canfield declared.

He turned away from the man and resumed gazing out the port. The terrain below was mountainous and coated with snow. Canfield studied the scene, but found it was difficult to keep his thoughts from straying. Something had disturbed him just now. What was it?

Suddenly, the answer came. His memory pinpointed the cause of his puzzlement and then just as quickly, he realized the same thing had been bothering him ever since his companion had come on board the rocket.

Shocked and upset, Canfield dragged his gaze away from the starry black sky outside. Against his will, he forced his eyes once more to rove slowly over the features of his seat-companion.

It was true, what he saw. He attempted to keep his glance from being too obvious, but actually he found he did not care too much whether or not he succeeded in concealing his astonishment. The fact that it was true was all that mattered. The evidence was all before him.

His companion was growing older - - - older every minute!

It seemed incredible, fantastic. Yet, his own eyes relayed the information. The man's image was changing like a face seen mirrored in a melting prism. His skull was shrinking; his veins enlarging; his features thickening.

Furthermore, when the stranger had collided with him at the stratodrome gate, Canfield now recalled that his hair had been definitely a greyish-black.

That same hair was now white - - - pure glistening white!

CANFIELD'S MIND engaged the problem immediately, shunting all other matters from his attention. What kind of shock was it that could completely age a man's features in so short a lapse of time?

A bell rang. Emerging from the flight control cabin of the rocket, the line hostess halted at the head of the aisle and announced: "There'll be another rocket blast in five minutes."

As she came forward, she added: "It will not be violent. However, please relax your heads against the pressure cushions - - - until the third bell rings. That will mean the plane has attained its new velocity. Thank you."

Canfield's companion nudged him. "That'll be the last push-push," he declared. His features were paled, yet exulant. "Thank God, I can count the minutes, now."

Canfield nodded. He allowed his head to fall back upon the spongy inflated support behind him. Soon, the second lap of his adventure would begin.

For after the second blast went off, as he well knew, the rocket plane would enter a long curving glide. This would eventually flatten out and the vessel would coast into the stratoport at San Berdoo for a jetpower landing.

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First however, the rocket would skim for several hundred miles along a course high above the Rockies.

Once the second battery of rockets were fired, the government safety rule went into effect which required all passenger seats to be reversed one hundred and eighty degrees. Thus, the occupants would face the rear of the plane for the remainder of the flight.

This regulation served to lessen the painful effects of de-acceleration. Once in a while, the reversed seats had even been known to save a few lives when crash landings took place.

Shortly after the girl's announcement, a second inferno of deafening noise reverberated through the ship's interior.

This uproar signaled the detonation of another mass of fuel. The forward impulse delivered to the vessel was sharply felt. Due to the lessening of the flight angle, however, the added acceleration did not create the discomfort that the passengers had felt in the first blast-off.

Gradually, the crescendo of sound died away.

Canfield's companion sought to reopen the conversation. "If I bore you, just let out a yell," he said. He smacked his lips and the gesture seemed almost obscene. "The fact is, you interest me, Brown."

Canfield carefully controlled his own distaste as he replied, "Why?"

"Your age, for one thing."

"Indeed?"

"Certainly. It intrigues me."

"I don't see why it should."

"Well, just take the fact that a person as up in years as you are should choose to travel by rocket. You're past seventy, I take it. The monorails are a damned sight more comfortable - - - "

"Luxury's not the most important thing in life," Canfield snapped.

"Time *is*, you mean."

"Perhaps. Let me ask you what you mean by 'old.' Offhand, I wouldn't say I was any older than you appear to be - - - to me."

The man groaned. "I knew I was slipping - - - but not that much." He gripped Canfield's arm, his skinny fingers clawing deep into the muscle beneath the cloth. "Tell me - - - what makes you say that? What is it about me? My hair turning? My eyes watering? Let's be honest. Wouldn't you say I was still twenty years younger than yourself - - - I'll make it fifteen. Fifteen good years in the right direction."

"No."

"Ten?"

Canfield's disgust mounted. "I don't think so."

The distressed man groaned a second time. "Then, it's true. I suppose the trouble is I hadn't expected it so soon. We all have to crack up in time." He clutched Canfield's shoulder. "Look, I admit - - - I'm a sick person. You could tell *that*, couldn't you?"

"I could hardly miss it," Canfield replied. His own nervousness grew.

The stranger began breathing in great noisome gasps. A full minute passed before he was able to throttle down his wheezing lungs, so he could speak again.

He said: "Do you mind if I ask what you do for a living?"

"It's of no importance," Canfield told him. "I'm going into retirement."

"But before, what were you?"

The professor debated within himself, before answering. Finally, he saw no harm in at least bordering on the truth: "A philosopher."

"That's hardly an occupation. But, it doesn't matter. Tell me, are you rich?"

Canfield shook his head.

"Moderately wealthy, perhaps?"

"I have a small personal fortune. Some folks might even call it fairly substantial."

"Have you ever stopped to think how your fortune - - - every single credit of it lumped together - - - would

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not buy you a single hour of the past?"

"Naturally," Canfield replied. "At some time or other, that thought occurs to all men."

"Ah, but suppose - - - let us say - - - that your money could buy you - - - " The stranger paused, moistened his cracked lips.

"Could buy what?"

" - - - a reprieve from time!"

Canfield permitted himself a scoffing laugh. "The human race left its superstitions behind with the Middle Ages."

"My dear Brown, in all due respect to your age and profession, let me tell you that - - - "

At that moment, the line hostess reappeared.

"Please reverse your seats," she said. "Simply press the knobs you find on the bottom paneling of your pressure chairs. The compartments will swing around automatically. We are about to go into a landing glide - - - "

The girl halted suddenly, choking off her words in the middle of a sentence. Her glance had swept Canfield and his companion, then turned away - - - startled or frightened.

Canfield felt impelled to speak up: "What's wrong . . . Miss Jordan - - - I believe it is? You're staring at us - - - or through us, one or the other!"

"The two of you . . . " the girl mumbled weakly, " . . . suddenly you look like twins!"

"Twins?" Canfield echoed.

Almost petrified, he turned - - - moving with dragging slowness - - - and faced his companion.

The two stared into each other's eyes. Now, Canfield saw unbelievingly that the other - - - in the process of aging - - - had become an indistinguishable duplicate of himself. It was hard to swallow but the man's countenance was now a virtual replica of Canfield's own face, that face so new to the scientist that he had not yet accustomed himself to it.

"This is a trick - - - !" the stranger shouted. His features reddened apoplectically. His eyes opened wide in terror. "You've been sent to spy on me, Brown. I won't have it - - - ohh!" His angered words abruptly ended in drivel. His face suddenly contorted in new pain. His attack had returned. "Ohhh God! Not again - - - !" his screeching voice protested.

"What is it?" Canfield pressed. "Can't you let us help you?" His gaze lifted, met that of the bewildered girl. Her bluish eyebrows arched in non-comprehension.

"This happened to him before . . . " Canfield said. "Only a few minutes ago."

"I - - - I think I waited too long . . . to answer the summons," the stricken man mumbled. "If I had only - - - "

A great disrupting vibration swept through the length of the ship, drowning out the rest of the groans.

The hostess' eyes reflected her undisguised alarm. Recognition of what the noise meant brought horror to her young countenance.

"What does it mean?" Canfield demanded.

"It's the thermo barrier - - - !" she shouted over the din. "Somehow, we've dipped too low - - - and without the dispersion shields out. The pilots'll have to blast back to space - - - if it's not too late!"

A second shuddering vibration racked the ship from nose to stern. The girl, caught off-balance, was hurled backward. Her head struck sharply against the metal door that guarded the firing tube compartment. She fell, crumpled, to the floor. The hem of her silver skirt billowed up, baring her awkwardly sprawled legs.

For a third time, the rocket plane was racked by a torturing blow - - - much as if a demon from outer space were striking it between a cosmic sledge-

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hammer and a cosmic anvil.

The nose began to wobble sickeningly. Canfield, himself, felt sick, crushed, weakened by vertigo. He tried to rise from the seat, intending to help the injured stewardess.

But before he could push forward, his stricken companion recovered from his misery enough to pull him back. Simultaneously, the man pressed a knob on the bottom paneling of the seat.

Glistening steel clamps, padded with a spongy substance at every point where they would contact the flesh, slid out of the chair arms. Operating like execution straps, these prongs effectively straight-jacketed the bodies of both men into the enveloping folds of the pressure seat.

Simultaneously, the whole compartment swung around so the trapped men faced the aft section of the vessel.

"That girl - - - !" Canfield protested.

"It's too late to help her," the companion groaned. "I'm doomed, too - - - but you, old fellow, you might live, if the crash isn't followed by an explosion! And *crash*, we're going to - - - sure as I've lived a hund - - - "

The bellow of tortured metal suddenly deafened their ears.

The plane shuddered anew to the forces tearing at it. A shrieking superchilled wind rushed through the interior of the rocket as the seams gave way. The vessel was changed into a twisting, gyrating coffin, completely out of control.

In the next instant, Canfield knew the great rocket was falling. Its pilots were unconscious or dead. Screams rose above the torrent of noise, the heart-rending yells of the other panicked passengers.

At Canfield's side, his companion's form suddenly stiffened - - - frozen into a portrait of unconquerable fright.

The man's seamed wrinkled face resembled that of some incalculably-ancient Asiatic peasant. "Gorken failed me . . . Gorken did this to me!" his high-pitched cracked voice complained. It was now barely audible.

Seconds later, a horrible sigh followed: "And now I die . . . "

The oxygen system of the whirling, spinning rocket, pierced at a hundred points, stopped functioning at that moment. The flying debris had transformed it and all the other controls into wrecked useless machinery. Further breathing became impossible.

In his last few conscious seconds, James Canfield remembered trying to find the knobs that would release him from his seat-prison.

But his palsied hands would not obey the frenzied command of his brain. That organ, itself, lost all grip on reality. The scene before him blackened, became a sucking vortex of darkness, pain and death . . .

The last word he remembered calling was: "Marilyn."

HE AWOKE SLOWLY, as a man awakes from an agonizing operation. How much time had passed he did not know: it could be hours, days, even weeks. But he knew only that he was cold, bitter cold and freezing.

It was an eternity before he could open his eyes. Not that he was not brave enough, in a philosophical manner, to face whatever scene should meet his eyes without flinching. It was merely that the physical effort called for more strength than his numbed shocked body could muster.

His other senses, those of touch, of balance, of pressure, were less paralyzed.

He knew that he was lying prone in some soft fluffy substance, that there was congealed blood on his forehead and left cheek, that his heart-beat was nearing normal as indicated by the pulse of his carotid artery where his neck pressed against his bent-under wrist.

This was not death, he knew. Then,

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what was it?

Summoning strength and will to his nailed-down eyelids, he finally succeeded in opening them.

The landscape before him was a sheet of snow. Beyond stretched a white fir-fringed meadow. At its upper end, there rose the misty crags of a mountain range.

Scattered everywhere were bright burnished fragments of metal. While Canfield's eyes remained open, the highly polished pieces of wreckage, trapped and reflected at him molten slivers of sunlight that stung his bewildered pupils.

No life was to be seen. Nor could life be expected still to reside in the torn pieces of human flesh that could be glimpsed in the debris of the shattered rocket. It was quite apparent to Canfield that he was the only survivor of the crash.

A full hour of consciousness passed, in which the scientist was unable to do more than lie helpless in the snow and congratulate himself on having won a few more hours of life than his fellows.

Finally, however, enough sluggish energy flowed into his seventy-three-year old frame to enable him to rise to his feet. Wobbly but unhurt, he stood atop a small white knoll and surveyed his grisly surroundings.

A few feet from him was the body of the girl hostess, crushed and broken in a manner that made him sick to see. Beyond her, the corpses of other passengers. And to his left, the relatively unmauled body of his flight companion - - - the curiously-aged man. Dead, also.

Memory of the last few minutes preceding the rocket plane's destruction now returned. A grim shadow settled on James Canfield. Was this to be the culmination of his nightmare, then - - - death in a remote mountain fastness? Was Marilyn, and all the matriarchal civilization that backed her in her preposterous rights, to have the last laugh on him?

No, he swore, it could not end this way - - - !

But, the outlook was bleak. What remained? Hope for rescue? Perhaps. Motor-sleds and helicopters had been known before to bring crash survivors out of the wilderness.

Yet, Canfield reasoned, if he were rescued, would not his true identity be - - - in time - - - traced to him? The publicity surrounding the crash might possibly shed new light on the trail he had hoped to cover up so effectively.

No, he must widen his avenue of escape. But, how?

He studied again the body of his late flight-companion. He bent over it, felt for the pulse, listened for heart, tested for breath. The eyeballs were glassy and without reaction when touched.

A glimmering of an idea filtered into his mind. To carry it out would call for barbaric ruthlessness.

But thought Canfield this was already a barbarous age. All one had to do was compare it to the niceties of the previous century - - - or rather, that part of the century prior to the Atomic Wars.

The girl had said he and the dead man looked like twins. If they resembled each other so much, then, why couldn't they exchange identities?

The plan seemed tight with logic. Resolved to pursue it, Canfield bent himself to the task that lay ahead. Though the chore was gruesome, the need to steel himself to it was so apparent that he felt little compunction at performing a deed that would have shocked and revolted him only a few days previous.

He began by stripping his companion of all attire. The body had aged as much as the face, the skin turned leathery and thickly ridged with varicose veins. Queer disease that could so strike a man, he reflected.

Shrugging off his worry, the professor removed his own one-piece outer garment. The bright sunlight that bathed

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his bare flesh was warm enough to more than compensate for the bracing chill of the thin mountain air. He pulled the suit over the dead man and then - - - faintly attacked by revulsion - - - put the dead man's clothes on himself.

Now to find out who he was.

He rummaged through the pockets. There was an ID card, similar to that carried by all citizens of America. The name was - - - Canfield drew in his breath suddenly - - - Oliver Brown!

The other Brown, the one from the Atlanta rocket.

He felt as if he were trapped in a vicious circle from which there was no escaping.

Around him, an incredible quiet settled upon the snow-packed slope. He found he had to sit down for a moment to regain his composure.

The confusion of the poor hostess was unexplained now, anyhow. She had evidently seated them both together, hoping they would soon exchange names and make an effort at getting better acquainted.

Brown must subconsciously have felt he was at the end of life, the way he kept talking despite his obvious handicap. In the end, however, he had suffered a curious reversal of character - - - and displayed the trait of utterly selfish cowardice; cowardice to which Canfield shamefacedly admitted he owed his own survival.

But the resemblance that developed between Brown and himself - - - how account for that? It seemed to defy all the odds of possibility that two faces should be so much alike. Especially, when one of the faces had been tailored to order.

Canfield came up short. A new factor had entered the game.

It was imperative that one of the matching faces, at least, should cease to exist completely.

Shuddering, he searched through the debris until he came across a jagged metal fragment. He estimated its weight at close to fifty pounds. Lugging the heavy improvised weapon over to Brown's body, he dropped it several times on the dead man's head.

The resultant pounding effectually obliterated the features.

Now, what? Oh yes, the remainder of the personal effects. He waited until his trembling body ceased gasping and then went through the pockets of his new attire.

There was a considerable amount of money in Brown's wallet, he discovered. He checked the sheaf of bills, ticked off fifteen thousand credits. A rich man - - - or a careless one, to carry that large a sum with him personally.

A number of business cards filled one transparent envelope of the wallet.

All bore conventional wording, except one which seemed to be a pass of some sort. The language on this white rectangle was akin to no modern idiom within Canfield's range of knowledge. It read:

Murten dra Keschutleinzten
Dra keschutleiglin varten kokschilner ent zeibadginstes, chein virz boschadenzeig lil kirtzlaken umvag dragte perzeint erd schlienterrenfeilabstuli.

Gorken

The explosive consonants and the tongue-twisting lengths of the words suggested the massive compounds of Teutonic speech. Yet, there was also hinted the same baffling polysynthetic agglutination that was so often found in the early American Indian dialects.

At any rate, Canfield thought, a man would be safe in wagering half his fortune that here was no language born on Terra. Here, despite the fact it had been transcribed in roman letters, was a language as alien to the Earth as those flaming meteorites that periodically hurled out of the sky to imbed their embers into Terran soil.

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Searching through his remaining pockets, the professor came across a meticulously folded visigram.

The 'gram bore nothing that betrayed its city of origin, but it was addressed to Oliver Brown, Jackson Space Station, Kansas City. The message was succinct to the point of bewilderment. It said, only:

FIVE DAYS.
G.

Five days to what, Canfield asked himself? To the mere falling due of a ten-thousand credit note - - - or to the end of the world?

The other belongings of the dead man were equally unusual. There was a gun, one of the new Scorpions. It was a glistening piece of mechanism, cylindrical in shape, tiny enough to fit in the palm of a hand and deadlier than the stonefish of the Great Barrier Reef.

There was a return trip ticket from Los Angeles to New Harvard by way of Kansas City, good by monorail as well as rocket plane if stopovers were desired.

Also, there was a spring-blade knife, a phial of pills with no clue to their nature to be found on the label, a chain with a dozen assorted keys, and a trimensional photograph.

The photo, sealed in a stereo-prism, showed the late Brown as a young man past thirty, if not younger. With him was a girl, red-haired and vivacious in appearance who looked younger than her companion, a girl who - - - Canfield's heart suddenly skipped a beat - - - was dressed in the sleek modern styles of the matriarch era!

That meant the trimensional replica could have been fashioned only in the last five years!

It was impossible - - - yet the photo had to be true! Somehow, Canfield knew, he had stumbled upon a paradox that promised to top all paradoxes in his experiences.

Suddenly, he coughed. A sharp slicing pain tore at his chest. His small reservoir of strength was exhausted. It was a wonder, he reflected, that his senile frame had stood up as well as it had under the combined shocks of the day. He knew the pain was a signal to slow up, a warning that his heart would protest any further strain on his part by collapsing completely.

Forcing himself to move slowly, he transferred the few credentials he had needed for his own identity as Oliver Brown of New Harvard to the uniform of the dead man.

Now, let the corpse be buried - - - and the harmless philosophy professor who had sought to escape the world with him! The world would not miss one more aberrated scientist.

Canfield glanced toward the sky. The sun was dangerously close to the grim peaks that bordered on the west. A few more hours and nightfall would bring a sixty-degree drop in temperature. That - - - and death. He shivered.

Where could the rescue teams be, he wondered? Surely, the stratoport officials had computed the area of fall by now. Surely, the sky-searchers were winging out in ever-converging circles, their detector-screens snooping for any trace of the rocket plane's wreckage.

In the very next moment, his despair vanished - - - and hope rose. Specks appeared in the blue. Specks that grew into great clumsy machines with spinning overhead blades. The whirly-birds!

CANFIELD'S EARS began buzzing. He suddenly felt light-headed, capable of storming the highest of the peaks that lay in the distance. These were grim symptoms, his failing powers recognized: they meant the thin atmosphere had finally taken effect on him. Another few minutes and he would be mindless.

Running to the open field, he waved excitedly at his rescuers in the sky. But

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before his eyes could resolve the huge copters into completely recognizable forms, his vision blurred and he felt himself pitch forward. The soft-packed snow came up to meet him, but he never saw it arrive. Its general aspect had darkened and vanished long before his brief fall was completed.

A few minutes later, he felt himself being revived. Some type of elixir, warm and honey-like to the taste, was being forced through his bloodless lips.

As his system absorbed the liquid, his body reacted violently. Liquid fire seemed to course through his veins. He sat upright and blinked open his lids.

Two members of the rescue party were supporting him. They were both women, garbed in the bright crimson uniforms of the government service.

Further on, another matriarch officer and three males, mechanics probably judging by the grease-stains on their furry smocks, were poking about in the scattered wreckage of the rocket plane. Resting on the sheet of snow just beyond were the copters, their rotors idling.

"How do you feel, now? The elixir working?" one of the women asked Canfield. "You seem to be okay - - - "

"I think I'm coming out of it," he murmured thickly, in reply. "I'm still dazed. Where am I?"

"Time enough for all the answers, later," he was told, briskly. "As if you didn't know, the rocket crashed. You had a narrow squeak, Mr. Brown. All died - - - all the others, except you."

"All dead?" he echoed. "Then, how come I - - - ?"

"Survived? Your luck. Some people have it."

"I seem to remember wandering about, looking for somebody," he went on. He knew he had to plead delirium, if he hoped to avoid any cross-examination later. "Dead people were staring at me . . . everywhere."

"You must have come to . . . " the woman said. "But, you were still out of your mind. We found your tracks. They were criss-crossed all over themselves."

"The - - - the other Brown?" Canfield inquired, cautiously. "I met him on the rocket. Nice chap from New Harvard. Was he - - - ?"

"Killed, too? Yes."

"Oh, God!" The professor started to rise, enacting a dazed bewilderment, but the uniformed women held him back.

"Take it easy, now," he was told. "There's nothing you can do. Soon as we make photo-records of the crash, we're lifting you off this mountain. Another team'll fly back later to take out the dead - - - or bury them." A thick female hand fell on his shoulder. "You're going to be all right."

Canfield did not answer. He stared straight ahead. Suspicion flared in his breast that any other words he might add could easily boomerang at some future date, snapping the very trap he hoped to avoid at present.

Be satisfied, he told himself. Your identity's been established. That's all that's necessary, for the moment.

The matriarch officer turned to the other members of her squad.

"We've done all we can do here. I just beamed the port. Orders are we get this man back to San Bernardino. Some clinic down in L. A. Center claims they got him on the ready list for an operation."

The woman lowered her gravelly voice, but not enough to prevent Canfield from hearing the remainder of her comment: "Makes you believe in fate - - - when you see an odd quirk like this. The sickest man aboard - - - and yet he's the one to survive. I hope I'm that lucky sometime - - - "

Canfield reversed his previous opinion. Much of the world had never left its medieval pattern. They wallowed in superstition, magic, the fetishes of chance.

He closed his eyes, as a second wave of weakness passed through his body.

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No use trying to fight back. He had done his best.

The mechanics brought up a litter. Gently, the men lifted Canfield on to the canvas support. They carried him to the largest of the whirly-birds, where two more helpers hauled him aboard. The cabin inside was as spacious as a four-room house or the interior of a mono-rail car; it contained a dozen hospital cots, an oxygen tent, surgical equipment, and flasks of plasmic generatives.

The mechs deposited Canfield on the nearest cot, then strode away. A few seconds afterward, another matriarch officer, wearing the white smock of a surgeon, appeared inside the cabin. She occupied herself for several minutes with the complex surgical apparatus, then suddenly turned and approached the half-conscious patient, brandishing in her thick right hand a small gleaming machine of intricate wiring. Her face was unsmiling. At the front of the energized machine, there protruded a funnel or inverted cone of polished metal. Without warning, the officer pushed the cone over Canfield's mouth and nostrils. A pungent scent filtered into his lungs, sweet and suffocating. *Again, blackness . . .*

THE HOURS that followed were living nightmare. Moments of consciousness alternated with dreadfully long periods of coma - - - and the coma, itself, was punctuated with dreams of interlaced horror. Canfield's tortured imagination writhed under the hallucination that he had been wrapped in a cocoon made from strip after strip of wet flapping rubber. The whole mummified mass - - - body and all - - - had been poured into a black hole, a yawning maw of emptiness connecting with extra-dimensional spaces. The hole, in turn, was zippered and closed after him. The passing of time came to have no meaning.

Each moment of wakefulness, however, instantly shattered the oppressing illusion for a second or two. Then, he became aware of light, sometimes diffused and sometimes glaring. Sounds jarred and jolted him; people spoke and wheels whirred. His body was tossed about, rudely jostled. But, he felt the sensations only for a moment each time before the hideous darkness closed in again and his body once more struggled in the clammy meshes of the cocoon.

There was one period of consciousness which stood out from the others, however. His auditory nerves retained the memory of one sentence, a fragment that persisted out of the gibberish of words which swirled around him when the deep coma temporarily subsided. Somewhere, sometime while he was awake, a man declared something that sounded like: "We'll take care of Brown. He's ours."

And a female voice that nearly choked under its own pebbliness answered: "Good. Take him. We accept your declaration of responsibility."

Again, Canfield suffered the feeling of being jostled inside his rubber coffin.

A shaft of light, brighter than a bolt of lightning, arced from the ceiling and opened a lid in his brain. A shower of molten gold was funneled into the skull that was laid bare - - - or so it seemed to Canfield's delirium-besotted mind. A new voice, harsh and glottal, said: "Brown sure got careless - - - letting himself rot like this. We should let him die, but Gorken has commanded that he remain in the League."

"Then, he's to be treated?" said a squeaky voice.

"Those are the orders."

"How much does he get this time, Flug?"

"Who you schliemieling? Only Gorken knows that. He dopes out the dosage. Get a move on - - - we got to get him quick in the operating room! If those nosey Angelenos start snooping - - - !"

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Footsteps shuffled near Canfield. Suddenly, he was overwhelmed by a second darkness in which there was no cocoon of rubbery sheets, no slavering nightmares, nothing but exhilirating peace.

ONCE AGAIN, he awoke - - - this time with a feeling of refreshment he had not known for forty years. All sense of weariness had fled; his nostrils caught new odors he had forgotten since childhood - - - the smell of synthetic rubber, of antibiotic spray, of moon-blush blossoms through an open window; his ears proved sensitive to the buzzing of a fly against a ceiling, the rumbling of a surface vehicle somewhere blocks distant.

Minutes passed, as more strength flowed into him. His eyes came open and stared upward at a high ceiling inlaid with convolute designs - - - geometrical designs that twisted and folded upon each other in a pattern as intricate as the folds in a slab of gray matter. Yet, bewildering as the pattern was, Canfield's lenses focused instantly on the trapped fly - - - a quivering dot among a thousand swirling arabesques. He found the insect and followed it in flight, almost able to measure the individual strokes of its wings.

What had happened to him? He sat upright in the immaculate bed and was surprised to find he felt no pain, no stiffness. He examined his arms, which protruded from the short sleeves of a hospital patient's gown. His skin - - - everywhere - - - was smooth, unblemished. The swelling veins, the crusty mottled skin, the leathery-like folds at the joints - - - all had vanished. His hands, formerly thickened and knotted like those of a carpenter or brickmason, had lengthened and slimmed. The tufts of hair on the knuckles had turned black.

Suddenly, he was overwhelmed with desire to view himself in a mirror. He disentangled his feet from the white syntho-linen sheet enveloping his limbs and pivoted a quarter circle on the base of his spine, coming finally to rest in a sitting position on the edge of the bed with his bare soles planted on the electronically-warmed floor. The whole maneuver constituted an acrobatic gesture he could not possibly have performed a week previous. He stood up without support and was surprised to find no wobbliness in his limbs or body.

The room was a narrow chamber with a half-shuttered window that framed blue sky. There was no visible sign of a door. The exit, if there was one, was probably seam-fitted into the unbroken wall, Canfield conjectured. To his right however, opposite a small lavatory, there did stand a full-length glass.

He walked over to the mirror, stripped off his gown and gaped in sudden awe at the naked young image presented to him. The lean brown figure in the glass was a long-forgotten memory from the past: a broad-shouldered slim-waisted duplicate of the graceful athlete Canfield had been at thirty.

The professor flexed his rolling biceps; the image did likewise. He lifted his arms. Pectoral muscles swelled, rippled on his chest - - - and the action was repeated by the reflection. He slapped his lean thighs and felt under his hands a strong disciplined pair of legs conditioned for marathon running or champion fencing. When the image responded with the same self-exploration, Canfield exhaled his breath. There was no doubt about it. Forty or more years had been lopped off his septagenerian body!

He had become a young man!

The shock of the discovery made him dizzy. The face he saw reflected was almost like his own at thirty; almost but not quite, for apparently the able work of the criminal surgeon in New Harvard City had effectively and irrevocably blotted Canfield's true counten-

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ance from the earth. Not even rejuvenation - - - if such this change might be called - - - could have restored those features. Instead, the face Canfield peered at was a face much like the one the original Oliver Brown might have possessed in his own earlier years.

Or had this face been Oliver Brown's to own, in just earlier years only? Canfield wondered. The man had spoken casually, yet guardedly, of this operation; he had known it was scheduled for him. Didn't that mean he *knew* he was to be rejuvenated? And didn't that also suggest he had possibly undergone the operation on many occasions before? Canfield tried to summon up a memory of all the other wild rantings his seat-companion had made during their short flight together. A thread of truth was suggested in Brown's madness. What was it he had said? To have lived a hundred years, in order to plant foot on the moon - - - ! Miracles were certainly not dead in the twenty-first century - - -.

Scientific miracles, anyhow.

But, where did an interloper go from here - - - an imposter still undiscovered? That was the next question, Canfield told himself, finding with surprise that he had begun to crave life. The sixty-four credit poser, as they had used to say during the Atomic Wars . . .

An opportunity to learn the answer to his wonderings was not long in forthcoming. Canfield's ears picked up a sudden buzzing noise like the sound of a power saw in motion. His young invigorated frame wheeled and poised in tense suspicion, his muscles and senses as alert in the face of danger as those of a wild animal or a super-reflexed patrol android. In the next instant, he had gathered up his gown and vaulted into the bed, assuming a position of repose. The movement was incredibly swift, so much so that for a brief second his body was a dull blur.

A section of the wall commenced to glow. As Canfield watched, its substance melted into translucence and then became gaseous. Suddenly, the entire section was gone. Through the shimmering rectangular passageway that was created, three figures entered the room. From his horizontal position, the professor studied them through half-closed lids. Two men - - - and a humanoid robot.

Both the humans were large meaty creatures, thick-muscled with battered facial lineaments. Yet, wary intelligence glinted in their unnaturally small eyes. Had their fleshy bodies been softer, they could have been mistaken for freemartins - - - - those sexless beings that occasionally were born into mutated families.

The robot, by contrast, was short and squat. Its underpinnings ended in wheels equipped with caterpillar treads, giving the automaton an odd look of wearing roller skates.

The first man through the wall halted at the side of Canfield's bed.

"Hey, Brown, you pulled through yet?" he asked. "Flug says he's got orders for you."

"Yeah," chimed in the other huge man. "Gorken's orders. I got them on tape with the tin gadget here." He jerked a beefy thumb at the robot.

Canfield feigned a first awakening to consciousness. He forced his lids to part slowly. He raised his hands and pressed them against his temples as if in pain, and then wondered almost immediately afterward if the gesture had been wise. These men would know well enough that his post-operative condition should be one of unparalleled euphoria. Nevertheless, he decided, he had no other choice but to play his part as the other Oliver Brown through - - - and to play it as well as his cunning and intelligence allowed. Immediate extinction might otherwise be his reward for stealing forty years of life he had not paid for. Any organization with such a power over time, itself, in its hands undoubtedly played with big chips - - - and for keeps.

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"I've been expecting the orders," he answered, cautiously. His brain, geared into greater efficiency than ever as the result of being nourished by a rebuilt heart and a jacked-up circulatory system, was analyzing and rejecting future courses of action at a speed that could be measured only in microseconds. "The operation was certainly a welcome sequel - - - (was that the word Brown would have used?) - - - to my ordeal after the crash - - - "

"Yeah, that was a rough go, Brown," Flug interrupted. "Guess you could appreciate a few years now." His thick features grew solemn. "Maybe you better start getting dressed, however. You know, get on your way."

"That's my orders, you mean?"

"No, they're on the tape, like I said. Gorken can't talk to you this trip. For the last month, he's only been in phase about five minutes a day - - - and that keeps him plenty busy, just running the League." He turned to his companion. "That right, Skink?"

His companion nodded. "Tough job he's got, too. Imagine, squatting out there in Tomorrow, watching everything what's going to happen. I'd hate to have my dimensions screwed up that way. But Gorken don't seem to mind."

"I take it, then, I'm free to go," said Canfield.

"Sure. Go out and sow some joy. You got the rocks to do it. L. A.'s just a taste of how lush we're going to make things, when we take over from the matriarchs."

"What about my clothes? Where are they?"

"Those rags?" Flug laughed. "A retread with as many banks as you own rates a new outfit - - - when he gets his face lifted." He laughed a second time, a horrible throaty chuckle. "You don't think the League can't afford it for you, after the kind of contributions you shell out to us - - - "

"I demand some kind of apparel," Canfield snapped, impatiently. He had decided it was time to risk a show of temper. Brown probably would have.

"Okay, okay," said Skink. "We got a new set of drapes for you, straight from Wilshire - - - a sharp siren suit with purple braid. It's all ready to hang on you, Brown. Only don't get wise with us. You jokers from outside may be footing the bill for the League - - - but us insiders stand in pretty good with Gorken, too. Don't push us around. *Remember, you've got no idea how long a treatment's good for - - -*

"I'll take that up with Gorken some time." said Canfield. It seemed to be about as good a reply as any.

Flug shrugged his huge shoulders. "No skin off my back, if you do." He turned to the humanoid robot which had stood motionless just inside the dematerialized passageway. "Read him the works, Buster. The man wants to go out and start lapping up the good-time joints."

A green poly-faceted crystal glowed into brilliant life on the blank metal-sheened face of the humanoid automaton. Its hollow voice rumbled out one brief sentence:

"Megherzteil draischilgin firzel oga scheikenkirtz!"

That was all. The two beefy men turned and regarded Canfield expectantly.

"You mean that's it?" Canfield replied. His speeded-up mind had immediately recorded the phonetic content of the message, but its semantic implication was completely lost to him.

"It's clear enough, ain't it?" snarled Skink. "Or maybe you don't remember your Draconian so good."

"Oh, I remember the language well enough," Canfield answered, surprised at his own suavity in the face of mystery piled upon mystery. "The brevity of it rather stopped me - - - "

"Don't worry. Gorken'll follow up with more commands in a month or so. You're paying your price for longevity, don't

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think you aren't."

"I've no doubt of that," said Canfield. He congratulated himself on injecting just the right amount of sarcasm in his reply. If he'd pushed it any more, he had an idea he couldn't have gotten away with it.

Flug grunted. "Good thing the high-and-mighty's out of phase for a while longer. I got an idea you wouldn't like swallowing those words, Brown." He accompanied his comment with a throat-slitting gesture. "Not if you had to choke 'em down through a new hole in your gullet."

"Look here - - - !" blustered Canfield. "If you think I'm going to let you flunkies - - - "

A showdown threatened to develop, but Skink stepped in to heal the breach. "I take it you're just letting off steam, Brown. Who wouldn't - - - with all that new vinegar in him?" He brought his palm down flat on the sheet at the foot of the bed, producing a resounding smack. "But we got another operation scheduled this morning - - - a woman. We can't gab anymore. Rise and shine, Ponce de Leon."

"Yeah," chimed in Flug. "You know we can't keep you around the clinic, forever, even if a wheel like you really wanted to hang around - - - !"

"It'll be a pleasure to get back in the saddle again." Canfield returned, coldly. He swung out of the bed and put on the hospital gown he had shed. "If you want to see how quickly I can make for greener pastures, just lead the way out of here."

For answer, Flug and his companion turned on their heels and plunged through the dematerialized opening in the wall. Next, the humanoid robot took after them. Canfield then followed closely behind. He had no idea where he was being led; but he recognized well enough that he was at the mercy of his benefactors. Riddle upon riddle had been presented him - - - with no light shed on any portion of the mystery. This talk of someone named Gorken, of a League, of men contributing huge sums of cash for the miracle of renewed youth, suggested a large-scale conspiracy. But, a conspiracy against what? Organized society? The government, itself? At present, there was no way of telling. But whoever the plot was against, there was no doubt that monstrous powers were arrayed behind it.

Oliver Brown, the original Brown, had been a key figure in the organization. That seemed certain to Canfield's agile brain, despite the disrespectful sniping he had just received from these two men who classified themselves as "insiders." The sniping stemmed from envy, the professor imagined. Envy - - - and hatred. Their souls seethed with it.

If he hoped to escape intact from all this intriguing predicament implied, he would have to plot his moves with infinite caution. Once he was safe on the streets again, once he was untraceable in the subworlds of his era, the personality of Oliver Brown would have to die or disappear - - - that was certain, if James Canfield was to spend his remaining years in the unworried peace he had planned for himself. The peace, he reflected bitterly, that he had sought from the moment he first decided to run away from New Harvard, the disgrace of Marilyn's behavior, and the other combined misfortunes of his past—a past which, in turn, seemed determined to catch up with him.

Yet, it was as clear, now, as a view through a telescope of unblurring skylon glass. Oliver Brown's identity would definitely have to cease to exist.

BEYOND THE ROOM wall, the three men and the robot emerged into an antiseptic corridor. The passageway was a mere horizontal shaft without doors or windows, yet Canfield suspected that invisible rooms lay on either side of him - - - reachable only by de-

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materialization of the intervening walls, themselves. As far as the modern age was concerned, the science of molecule polarization was in its infancy; yet, here it was demonstrated in a form that would have been called impossible by all the century's best brains, if told of it second-hand. Canfield realized he had been given another inside look at a science immeasurably advanced beyond that of the outside world.

The corridor terminated in a spiral escalator, whose moving steps descended like a twisting corkscrew to the lower floors of the building. "This way," said Flug, depositing his heavy bulk on the first stair which promptly unfolded and conducted him downward in a tight circle. The others followed.

The procession passed three more levels before the escalator straightened out to become transformed into a moving belt. The small group rode the belt down another corridor that was almost identical with the shaft on the upper story.

Near where the conveyance ended, the men stepped off while their robot companion rode on to whatever inscrutable personal destination it had in mind. Skink pressed a knob on the buckle of a black leather belt that girded his smock. The wall in front of the men gradually lost its substance, became a curtain of dancing motes that temporarily blinded the eyes, and finally vanished entirely.

The trio entered the room beyond. Flug pointed to a hook where hung a bright scarlet suit with gold and purple braid on the shoulders and a gold-tasseled strap around the waist. "That's yours, Brown. Gift of Gorken. You won't be conspicuous in the Angels City now - - - that is, if you're really ambitious to caper before going home." His thick lips grunted. "We got you about five years too young, anyhow - - - but a few days in the pleasure blocks is guaranteed to gray you up a little."

"You can tell Gorken I feel properly flattered," Canfield replied.

"Sure, sure." Flug shuffled to a desk in the center of the bleakly furnished room. "Here's the rest of your loot. You were really groggy when the matriarchs dumped you on us. Bet you don't even remember us turning you inside out - - - "He looked up suddenly and his broad moronic face grinned slightly. Evil intelligence made his eyes glitter. "- - - Fact is, I wouldn't even have thought you was Brown if your prints hadn't matched!"

Canfield exerted tremendous effort to control his reflexes, but succeeded only partially in preventing his superbly-conditioned body from starting under shock. The casual announcement that the whorls of his fingers had matched those of the original Brown was enough to send his brain reeling - - - as much in non-comprehension of the marvel itself as in realization of the fact that had non-duplication showed up, it would have earned him instant extinction.

He replied, casually, "Your caution was commendable, Flug. If Gorken condescends to speak to me next time, I'll pass on a good word - - - "

"Sometimes, you don't even talk like Brown. That extra five years sure unsettled you, I can tell that - - - "

"Too much vinegar," Canfield replied, smoothing over the suspicion by aping the same phrase Flug, himself, had accepted as an explanation of his altered behavior. "I'll have to watch myself, I see - - - can't have the matriarchs getting leery of me - - - " He began to don the scarlet suit.

"Nope, you can't," said Flug. He brought out a large plastic bag from the desk drawer. "Your I. D. card, your League card and the rest of what we took off you's in there. The Scorpion, too. That's a neat little needle shooter, by the way. Almost copped it off you."

Canfield accepted the bag, delved into

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it and transferred the contents to the multifold disguised pockets of his apparel. He was pleased to note that his micro-radio collar band had survived the vicissitudes of his removal from the scene of the rocket plane crash. Like so many citizens of his era, he found the miniature device as indispensable to his daily life as a wristwatch, for example, had been to his ancestors.

Skink spoke up: "I guess you remember the way out."

"I'm still a little turned around," Canfield answered, cautiously.

"Take the spiral back up a floor. Lobby's to the right. You got your pass with you - - - that's all you need."

Canfield nodded. He turned and walked through the wall. It closed and solidified behind him.

Once out of sight of the two men, he felt like mopping the cold sweat from his temples. But he fought down the urge. For all he knew, scanning discs were at this very moment scrutinizing his slightest reaction. Any point the size of a nailhead could conceal a spy-viewer. It was better to be calm, nerveless, as he threaded the remainder of his way out of the maze. He wondered about Flug and Skink. Were they what they seemed to be - - - attendants? Or something more sinister: guards, surgeons, or acolytes with entree into the League's greatest secrets?

He knew one thing, for certain. Enough suspicion had been aroused already. He could not afford to risk aggravating it.

Canfield's step was springy, as he walked rapidly down the moving corridor-belt, gaining distance even as the treadmill ran in a reverse direction under him. When he reached the spiraling escalator, he looked around for a switch panel or button that would make the steps flow in the opposite or upward direction. Finding none, he decided not to linger further in search. His ignorance would almost certainly betray him to any scanners watching.

Taking the mobile steps three at a time, he bounded upward. Two days earlier, the action would have exhausted his lungs and excited his heart into a triphammering frenzy. But, now his feet flew over the changing, dissolving steps as if he had equipped them with gravity nullifiers. He arrived at the next landing without a trace of increased flutter to his pulse, without a fraction of his breath being jolted.

Standing a few feet away from him on this new floor, Canfield saw the squat humanoid automaton that had relayed him Gorken's tape-recording message. The mechanical creature's single orb was regarding him intensely. The robot was resting its metalcased body on one limb, while it held the other leg a few inches off the ground. The caterpillar-treaded wheel of the unused foot spun rapidly, creating an odd impression that the robot was dangling a moto-driven yoyo.

"Your pass, sir?" the creature's hollow voice demanded.

"You know damned good and well who I am," Canfield retorted, asking himself at the same time if the creature's positronic mind was as sensitive to differences in human beings as the professional cyberneticists claimed. "You gave me a message only a few minutes ago!"

"You were accompanied by others, then. Now, you are alone."

"That makes a difference?"

"My orders make a difference," the robot replied, enigmatically. "Gorken has commanded it."

Canfield sighed and produced the card he had filched from Brown's body - - - the card with the strange Draconian words.

The robot scanned the card, handed it back, and abruptly lowered his spinning foot to the floor. Where the metallic appendage came into contact with the wire-embedded concrete, a pattern of sparks like the spray from an emery wheel arose to fill the air with the smell

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of burnt metal. The robot's three-fingered hand fumbled with knobs on its small barrel-like chest. Finally, it twisted the stud it had been seeking.

The wall dropped away.

The phenomenon of dematerialization was one to which Canfield had now become fairly well accustomed. He stepped through the opening - - - stepped through and found himself alone on a Los Angeles street!

Alone - - - with no sign of a building near him!

THE LAND seemed tilted, somehow. He was standing on the curb of a spacious boulevard, lined with palms and pepper trees. As might be expected in a California metropolis, there were no other pedestrians in sight between him and the horizon. However, a stream of surface vehicles, jetmobiles and atom-powered lorries for the most part, flowed past him on the wide divided pavements. Behind him stood a park, level and green, bordered by oleanders and boasting a dozen or more tennis courts that had fallen into decay. Athletic competition had lost its popularity in a female-dominated age.

Canfield stared mystified, at his new surroundings. Unbelief permeated his brain: This sudden dissolving of one's environment made a man feel queasy, disturbed. It smacked as much of black magic, as it did of man-made science; if what had happened was not all a vicious hallucination, it would seem that the League could juggle space as easily as it could bend time.

Another phenomenon bid for his attention. The traffic was moving too slow, far slower than normal for speed-mad California. Why was that? Canfield pondered - - - and as he did, a jet-copter of the municipal patrol dipped out of the hot blue sky to bellow out an announcement by sound amplifier to the traffic below. The tones of the command rumbled in a *basso profundo* over the landscape.

Lifting his gaze to watch the copter in action, Canfield discovered that he could almost make out the shape of the twirling horizontal blades. But that was hardly possible! What craft could hover at that low an RPM reading.

Again, his attention was distracted. A vehicle pulled up to the curb to discharge a passenger. The rider who alighted, a young woman in green halter and striped shorts, appeared to emerge from the car with agonizing hesitation. When she finally stood on a fixed strip of sidewalk, she uttered a few final words to the driver: "By-bye, darling. Be a lamb - - - and pick me up again at twenty-one hundred." Her escort barely nodded and drove away.

The exchanged words were quite distorted to Canfield's ears, though he recognized them as English. The intonation was altogether too drawn-out and low-pitched, much like the sounds that are created when a tape is drawn too slowly through a reproducing apparatus.

A few seconds' cogitation brought the answer. Nothing was wrong with the outside world. Absolutely nothing. Solid, unchangeable, everything in it was no different than it had ever been.

But in himself, a change had occurred: in his mind and in his body. While the world had not reduced its frenzied pace one slightest iota, Canfield's reactions - - - on the other hand - - - had speeded up until his senses no longer interpreted the messages they received in quite the same manner as they had, formerly. He was out of kilter.

But, why was it that he hadn't noticed the maladjustment the moment he awoke in the League clinic? Was it because his rejuvenation hadn't yet reached its peak effect on him? That seemed a possible answer, but a more likely one suggested itself. Behind the impenetrable walls of that strange institution maintained by Gorken, the temporal flow, itself, was somehow controlled and

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modified.

As soon as he had reasoned out a key that satisfied him to the problem, Canfield sighed with relief. His mind was not discouraged by the discovery of this handicap, if "handicap" it could so be called. His inventive faculties immediately saw how the stepped-up apperception of time could be a great advantage for him if he were forced to dodge enemies very long in this rat-race he had brought on himself.

The important thing, now, was to get away from the scene. At any moment - - - and the thought chilled him - - - the League might discover its mistake. If the organization did, it would send out its minions immediately to hunt him relentlessly down. Gorken would brook no failure.

His agitated brain began seeking new avenues of escape. He would have to reformulate his old plans, probably make for the Latin Belt sooner than he had expected.

But even as Canfield's thoughts raced in a whirlwind, his mind continued to be intrigued by the nature of the League, itself. What was its ultimate goal - - - and who was Gorken? How many members had subscribed to its life-prolonging services. How fabulous was the price they paid?

Compared to these questions, his own problems and the psychical damage that had been wrought to his life by Marilyn seemed of puny concern, indeed.

Puny, perhaps - - - he quickly assured himself - - - but still highly important to this one individual. No man could ever hope to solve the riddle of any existence but his own; the first law of nature was, certainly, due to one's self.

And, yet - - -

Canfield shook his head, irritated at his own indecision, his own weakening. What did he owe the world? Nothing. Of what concern of his was it that unnaturally long-living men should conspire with one another against the established order of things?

An aero-cab swooped down from the pattern of flying traffic overhead, sprouting wheel gear as it hovered for a moment above the block-wide boulevard. A moment later, it landed and drove up to the curb, converted for the occasion into a surface car. The pilot a dark-complexioned man, Latinish in appearance, protruded his head out of an open port and called: "Taxi, sir? Fly you anywhere in the city - - - "

Canfield's instinct mounted in apprehension. He smelled a trap. Matriarch agents or a spy from the League, he could not say which? - - - but somebody had been sent after him. That was obvious.

"No," he shouted to the dark man. "I don't need a cab, now."

"But you will have a long walk to anywhere. Better get in. The belts give out, a block from here - - - "

"The devil with the belts!" blurted Canfield. Panic stirred in him. He wheeled and commenced across the park, walking as rapidly as he could without running. He followed a graveled path that bordered the grassy tennis courts and then twisted past a small lake.

Suddenly, he comprehended that the scenery was rushing by him altogether too fast. He discovered this accelerated pace he was marking off, not by any reference to points in his environment or other evidence offered by his eyes, for his perception offered him little clue to the experience; but by the fact the surface of his body began heating more rapidly than his system could possibly cool it. The still air about him had become thick and heavy, resisting his passage as though he were struggling to push forward under water.

He forced himself to slow up, though it seemed to him that his feet fairly dragged. The world was too sluggish for him, now that he was young. It would take time before he learned to pace all

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his movements so they would seem normal to the eyes of others. Above all, he would have to remember to slacken the speed of his speech: otherwise, his voice would sound high-pitched, almost squeaky to his fellows.

A HALF MILE'S brisk hiking brought him out of the parkland to a housing area made up of block upon block of identical quonset-like dwellings. Canfield still had not got his bearings. Modern Los Angeles and its allied towns stretched virtually from Victorville to La Jolla, a vast community of infinite interests spread out on the *llanura* plains and thrusting a thousand pseudopods up the narrow canyons. Probably no living mind had ever memorized each one of the 25,000 street names and place names that served to locate the city's fifteen million people.

At his right, near the housing area's business section, Canfield spotted a pneumotube station. Local most probably, he thought. Still, in the ticket station there might be a map to tell him where he was and how to get to the heart of the bewildering metropolis.

He crossed a slender aluminum bridge, graceful and fragile-looking as metallic lace can ever be, that arched upward over a sunken freeway. On the opposite side, there began a small moving walk that conducted him inside the station.

Here however, a set of electronically-guided turnstiles intervened between him and the tiny waiting lobby. As he approached the wire-mesh ticket cage, a pretty girl on duty inside looked up. Her blue eyes reminded him vaguely of Miss Jordan, the dead rocket line hostess. In view of his youth, he wondered the presence of the latter girl would affect him now - - - emotionally, that was. Could personality change as age was taken away? One thing was certain - - - if the past could be arranged so Miss Jordan still lived and he met her again, he would certainly face an exacting test to determine whether rejuvenation had altered his taste and instincts - - - not to mention his appeal. What an illuminating contrast there had been between those two female types, Marilyn and the girl on the rocket plane!

Canfield stopped in front of the cage. "Is this the tubecar I take to reach Hollywood?" he asked the ticket seller.

The girl's eyes swept over him, as if she were bent on taking in the full measure of his trim youthful body. Her breath caught in a slight gasp, and her mouth opened to an expressive, appreciative "O". She flashed him an engaging smile (no tiny diamond cap on her teeth, either, so she was still a virgin). The smile was warm and responsive - - - the kind that had used to awaken heart-stabbing memories in Canfield's soul whenever he would catch a pair of lovelorn students in his classes in the act of exchanging just such affectionate glances. Those same students, he knew, had regarded him as an old fogey, to whom love was both absurd and probably a mystery.

But now, Canfield, the ex-lecture room drone, had actually intercepted a girl's smile, himself. And the worst of the matter was that he liked it. Yes, he admitted to himself, he really liked it. The lyrical words of Leigh Hunt's magic little rondeau came back to him:

Say I'm weary, say I'm sad,
Say that health and wealth have missed me,
Say I'm growing old, but add,
Jenny kissed me.

"This is La Badana Perdida station," the girl said. "Twenty-three miles to Hollywood. You can take any of the tubecars here." She gestured toward the platform. "But, you'll have to transfer at the Glendale Shuttle."

"Thank you," said Canfield, pushing forward some currency in payment for his ticket.

The girl's eyes sparkled. "You're certainly welcome, sir."

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The turnstile counter clicked and he passed on through.

At that moment, he was so stirred he would have given his soul to linger in the waiting room. His interest was aroused and pinpointed by this one simple incident that suggested so much more about his changed condition than it told. When was the last time he had ever felt a hot flush on his cheeks? It was a cheering sensation to know you had become physically attractive to a generation twice removed from yours, even though you had always previously discounted that generation because of its devotion to ideals of physical perfection in preference to perfection of mind.

But at that moment, with a hiss of escaping air, a car emerged from the northern vacuum shaft of the station and decelerated to a jolting halt directly in front of the platform. With a last farewell look behind him, Canfield surrendered his ticket to the surly-voiced and somewhat harrassed-appearing female conductor and found himself a well-padded seat inside. A second or so later, the car was hurtling at immense velocity through a tunnel of emptiness and darkness.

Stops along the mad route occurred at dizzying frequency. At one time, Canfield would have found the bone-crushing changes of acceleration as intolerable as the intermittent blasts of the rocket plane had been. But now, his new attuned system bore up under the discomfort with a nonchalant ease that brought envious scowls from his fellow passengers.

On reaching the Glendale Shuttle, he transferred to a longer tube-train, an express, which carried him southward at furious speed. Pershing Square, he had decided, would be a safer destination - - - besides giving him a chance to throw any pursuit off the track.

Again, the ride offered his restless gaze nothing but the blank monotony of tubular walls unless he chose to study the car's interior. An endless row of ad-cards bordered the inner circumference of the hurtling car at eye-level. There was no avoiding them. The cards dazzled a viewer's vision, if not his imagination, with their kaleidoscopic pictures in glowing fire-colors. The accent was constantly on illustration of the product - - - a reversal that could lead in time only to the primitive ideographs of man's eave-dwelling ancestors. For, only three of the messages allowed themselves to be cluttered up with more than two short words apiece - - - and few of these words boasted more than a single syllable.

Evidences that a matriarchal culture was dominant in America was present everywhere in the ads for a psychological-minded observer to find and note: The figures were male, almost always - - - males in swimming straps, plugging the wonders of JIXO, the "needle beer that gives you kicks, oh!"; males in radiant blouses and tailored breeks, proclaiming the virtues of Gaga, Zso-Zso, and Blip, the synthetic breakfast foods that "satisfy and laxify"; males in space uniforms demanding their rations include Nu-Sal, the "extra-flavorful" substitute for sodium chloride.

Canfield's exhilirated senses absorbed the forty-eight messages posted in the car at one single glance, then turned away - - - overwhelmed by disgust. Like a few of his former colleagues, he had matured in an era when men still outnumbered women, instead of constituting a thirty-five percent minority of the population - - - and his masculine ego didn't particularly relish the debilitating trends of the times.

A few additional seconds of travel brought the tube-car spinning into the pneumo-circuit's downtown terminal one hundred and fifty feet below Pershing Square. The moment the car slowed to braking speed, Canfield sprang to the vestibule exit, slashed at the metal seal that held the ports closed whenever

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the vehicle was in motion, and - - - with a powerful thrust from his shoulders - - - jarred the doors apart.

He leaped on to the platform that slid by slowly, his own body a running blur. Ignoring the escalator and the angered shouts of a few people he had to push aside, he dashed up a long ramp whose sign indicated it would bring him to the surface a block distant, on the east side of the Hill Street Airway.

Sunlight broke upon him when he emerged into the daylight, and the transition was like the opening of a window into the shield of a nuclear pile. His heightened senses recoiled, and his eyes stung under the glare - - - painfully - - - before his pupils could shrink in accommodation.

As he started to walk north, a cab swung up before him. The vehicle's stubby wings revealed it was built for air traffic as well as ground driving. The lines seemed familiar and a sense of imminent danger warned Canfield to employ caution. He halted. While he stood waiting, the rear door of the car slid open on automatic hinges, inviting him to hop in. The pilot of the vehicle, however, did not show his face.

Anticipating trouble, Canfield decided to quit running away from it. This was time for a showdown. He darted around the aero-car with blinding speed and fury, halting behind his victim before the man could avert his face in the opposite direction to hide his features.

"You!" said Canfield. His hands snaked for the needle weapon in his pockets.

"Slow up!" the driver commanded. Dark-brown intelligent eyes shone out of a tanned face. Canfield remembered the face well from having photo-recorded it in his brain only a few minutes previous. His opponent was the pilot-driver who had attempted to pick him up as a fare in the park.

The cabman spoke quickly: "I have a para-gun trained on you. It will fire the moment my pulse rises from normal - - - and I assure you I can control my heart-beat at will. *Asi*, you would be dead before you could draw that Scorpion toy from your pocket. Now, will you be reasonable, Senor Canfield, and get in? Otherwise, I assure you that your peril will grow and grow, every hour that you are free!"

CANFIELD HAD TO face it. He was cornered, finally. The fire that coursed through his re-invigorated arteries tended to make him react to his capture like a trapped nerve-strung beast. But his mind was still a tough adaptable thing, fortified with seventy-three years of accumulated wisdom and rigorous self-discipline. From its depths of strength flooded the power he needed to control and dissemble the panic of his thirty-year-old body.

"All right," he said, shrugging slightly. "You got me. You people win."

He scrambled into the rear of the air-taxi and the reinforced metal port closed behind him on noiseless servomagnetic rollers.

Turning around from his position at the wheel, the pilot held out his left hand. "If you don't object, I'll take the Scorpion right now." He flashed twin rows of white teeth, creating an entirely unabashed smile.

"And if I do object - - - ?"

"Simple: I paralyze you. You see, it's only a simple precaution. You might try to make a break from me, before I get this mission completely wrapped up. It would be a very sad thing."

Canfield dug out the mini-sized cylindric weapon and surrendered it to his captor.

"You seem to know more about me than I do myself," he said drily. "I don't know why you even bothered to play me out in this cat-and-mouse game."

The pilot clicked his tongue in reproof. "You race toward illogical conclusions like a man bent on joining the

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angels. A bad habit. What I must tell you, is that you have a great deal of learning to do - - - and not much time."

"Let me ask you just one thing," said Canfield. "Are you one of Gorken's boys?"

"I'd as soon play footsy with a boa constrictor, *amigo*. But, *un momento*. The town is too crowded along here . . . visiscanners could be operating, anywhere - - - "

The dark man pressed a control button and the aero-taxi moved forward along the pavement. In this part of the city, few streets met in intersections, all of the north-and-south thoroughfares having been rebuilt at higher levels so they would channel traffic completely over the east-and-west streets. Hence, it was possible on medial-divided avenues to attain take-off velocity in a matter of seconds and continue one's journey by entering the stream of air traffic.

The small cab, powered by cold jets, took advantage of this fact to lift quickly into the air and swoosh upward at a stiff but entirely legal rate of climb.

At a thousand feet, the flier broke into a pattern relatively free of other planes. Below, Los Angeles could be seen in all its panoramic grandeur, beginning at the beaches and spreading in all directions as far as the eye could see, community after community. The hideous pits and scars of atomic warfare, so common a sight in the few large population centers remaining on the Atlantic seaboard, had been largely erased and filled-in here in the West. Wherever the raw earth had been laid bare, the vigorous race of Californians, swarming like frenzied beavers, had thrown up their mass-produced structures of plasto-concrete by millions. Now, the land teemed with people and only two factors had prevented the hardy race from breeding itself into suicidal thirst and starvation: the discovery how to freshen sea-water on a mass scale and the general shortage of men.

Captor and captive flew onward in the tiny winged cab. Below them, endless boulevards, canyons, foothills, and then more boulevards slipped by.

Presently, the dark-complexioned man broke his sustained silence. He whistled through his teeth and said: "I think I've eluded them. This isn't a registered aero-cab - - - and sometimes the matriarch police get a little curious about such activities."

"I thought this was a gang city."

"Oh, sure, there's an underworld here that's big enough to stand up once in a while and slug it out with them. But, you mistake me. I am not the underworld - - - *So* - - - " he gestured with his slim shoulders, " - - - I must look to my own resources. Now, Canfield-Brown - - - - I say that because I should start calling you Brown - - - I must take you to friends."

"Whose friends? Yours? I've got a feeling they couldn't be mine."

"They are the friends of humanity," was the pilot's answer.

"How do I know that?"

"You don't. For the moment, you have only my word - - - and the fact your corpuscles aren't right now coagulated in your bloodstream. Incidentally, permit me to introduce myself, I am Juano Picozzi."

"Thanks. I'll decide later if I should be glad to have made the acquaintance."

"That's your privilege. You will be, however . . . don't worry."

"Be what?"

"Be calling this day the finest day in your life, perhaps."

"Oh, sure."

"And another thing, professor, would you mind shoving your consonants a little further apart? I'm *hispanoparlante* myself, but you still rattle faster than any male human being I ever heard in my life. Course I know your system's been souped up. By the way, tell me - - - " Picozzi flashed an ingratiating grin, " - - - how does it feel to be young

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again?"

Canfield decided he could relax slightly. The fellow was disarmingly amicable and he himself was temporarily helpless. Whether Picozzi could be completely trusted would, obviously, depend on what kind of people those "friends" he had mentioned turned out to be.

"I might as well be frank with you," Canfield said. "I like it fine - - - though I'm as confused right now as Davey with the goblin. I'll be damned if I can discern how it happened - - - or why."

"There is a why, I can assure you," Picozzi replied.

"That makes me feel better."

"Why?"

"The curse of our human minds," Canfield commented. "Our sense of logic keeps us from being happy unless we can see everything in the shape of causes and effects."

"Which can be folly, *senor*. Sometimes, the world is mad."

"Is the world mad, now?"

"No. A little skizzy, perhaps - - - that is all. But there is perfectly good sense in what has happened to you - - - as you shall soon learn."

The stubby-winged aero-car banked to the left and commenced descending rapidly. Finally, it contacted the ground, negotiating a bumpy landing along a lonely paved road that wandered senselessly among the ravines of the coastal mountains. In this region, civilization showed signs of thinning out and the only habitation in sight was a small cubical structure of gleaming white plasto-concrete which huddled close to the largest of a series of sheltering brown hills.

Picozzi headed in that direction. The road grew dusty and finally terminated at a gateway about three hundred feet from the cube. At this point, Picozzi halted the cab.

"This is close as we can get without walking," he announced. "A force field surrounds the house." He reached into a compartment and brought out two black metallic discs, each about the size of an inexpensive photometer. He handed one to Canfield. "Here - - - hook this into your belt." At the same time, he proceeded to strap the other object about his own waist.

"What do you call this toy?" Canfield asked, running an exploratory finger over the smooth impenetrable surface of the disc broken only by a button.

"Something no self-respecting freeman of a few centuries from now would think of being without."

"That explains everything."

Picozzi laughed. "You're now wearing a field nullifier," he elaborated. "The shield'll keep you from bruising yourself against a barrier that's harder and a damned sight more durable than a thousand stone walls."

Picozzi pressed a contact on the dash. The rear port of the aero-cab swung open, freeing Canfield, who promptly stepped out. A second later, the smiling Latin joined him and patted himself on the chest. "Smell that around here," he said. "Fresh air. You won't find it within thirty miles of Pershing anymore."

Canfield swallowed several deep breaths and decided he agreed. However, he continued to eye Picozzi carefully. That the friendliness between them still remained to be tested was clearly evidenced by the para-gun the pilot still carried, a sleek trim weapon capable of beaming any form of paralysis from a light shock or stun to a blow that would effect a complete stoppage of respiration and blood circulation in a victim.

"Walk ahead of me about ten feet," Picozzi directed. "Not so fast either - - - because the field doesn't give. When you hit the barrier, step back and push the button on the nullifier. You'll feel the same kind of a buzz you'd have if you were stumbling across Luna with a snootful, but the wall'll seem to fade faster than a hundred-credit note in

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a Striptown casino - - - and that's what you want."

The better part of valor told Canfield he should obey. He moved forward. However, he had not advanced more than fifty feet before his further progress was barred by an invisible, unyielding substance, completely transparent yet adamantine to the touch.

Remembering Picozzi's injunction, he activated the black disc he had hooked to his waist. Vertigo seized him almost immediately - - - a sickening feeling that the atoms of his body had shifted orbits; a feeling that every particle of matter that went to guarantee his corporeal existence had been elevated to a higher plane in the universe, forced to vibrate along a higher wave-length of reality.

Yet at the same time, he suffered no loss of contact with his current environment. The sky above was the same burning blue with occasional fluff; the same breeze off the ocean tingled his skin; his ears caught the terminal bars of a brief rhapsody of bird-song in a nearby pair of sycamores.

Since he was still in the same universe, he might as well press forward, he thought. He put out one brisk step, followed it with another - - - and found he could go forward. The force field in front of him yielded. The effect of passing through it was similar to walking through a gob of dough; the air inside the field seemed to take on the characteristics of a viscous rubbery substance which slowed him up but did not actually impede his progress.

Having no notion of how deep the barrier might extend inwardly, Canfield kept walking. He suspected that to turn off the nullifier prematurely might call down instantaneous destruction upon himself.

Presently however, Picozzi called out to him from behind: "We're safely through, now. You can de-nullify."

Canfield obliged with alacrity, welcoming the return to relative normality and the accompanying relief from vertigo.

"That wasn't so grueling an experience, was it?" his captor said, strolling up to him. He was no longer carrying the para-gun in his hand; rather, the weapon hung loosely from his belt. "Like I said, it's common enough for our poor descendants. A man with your rebuilt constitution should have felt nothing at all - - - "

"I didn't break through that kind of opposition when I played quarterback at Old Harvard," Canfield snapped.

Picozzi laughed. "Believe me, *amigo mio*," he said, "you have no idea how rugged things *can* get."

The Latin moved ahead to take the lead, careless of his prisoner to the point of disdain. The dusty path soon brought the two men within a few steps of the plasto-concrete structure, at which moment a door suddenly slid open in the white shining cube - - - slid and vanished into vertical grooves in the wall. In the aperture that was created, there could be seen an eye-wrenching darkness, as deep and impenetrable as any of the sunless shadows that made exploring a peril in the craters of Luna.

"This is my home - - - or my hideout, I suppose I should call it," Juano Picozzi said. "Humble as it is, there's no place quite like it - - - as I hope you'll discover on stepping inside. I don't know. It may strike you as being as cornily arranged as some 'fourth-dimensional' maze in a carnival park. But it serves my purpose - - - and I accept responsibility for that, also."

The Latin stepped across the threshold - - - and the wavering blackness promptly swallowed him as though he had never been.

Canfield followed him without hesitation. As he passed into the cube's interior, the bright sunlight behind him was suddenly eclipsed; yet the region that he entered proved not to be the

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realm of stygian darkness he had supposed. In leaving the daylight behind, he experienced a momentary sense of dislocation in space - - - a disturbing feeling similar to that he had known when he passed through the dematerialized walls of the League clinic and suddenly found himself along a busy Los Angeles thoroughfare.

Once inside the structure, Canfield's bewildered vision adjusted to a new scene - - - a long room, comfortably furnished and tastefully decorated with pastel walls and neo-glass ceiling through which soft light was filtered. Doorways at either end suggested the existence of other rooms, spacious and real; yet, their very presence defied all the spatial limitations that logic would have said were imposed by the dimensions of the cube's exterior.

Here, Canfield recognized at once, was a concrete demonstration how to squeeze space through a series of collapsing *n*-extensions, a feat that had always been known to be theoretically possible according to the mathematical equations of Schadiel. But the practical application of the discovery hitherto had always defied every attack upon it - - - despite brow-racking work by the era's best engineers. The conclusion was obvious. If the cube-shaped house had been constructed by Picozzi, himself, there lurked no ordinary intelligence behind his suave and amiable manner.

"You see how inaccessible we now become," the Latin remarked at Canfield's side. There was a slight overtone of amusement in his voice. "Gorken, himself, would have a very devil of a job barging his way in here - - - even if his *in-phase* time gave him enough leeway to try it. Although - - - " and here, Picozzi shivered slightly " - - - the fiend might have strolled around here yesterday when he was out-of-phase. In that case, he's studying us right this minute!"

"How can that be?" Canfield asked.

"A simple matter of temporal disequilibrium," Picozzi replied, this time shrugging phlegmatically. "But, why call down needless calamities on ourselves?" His tan features frowned for a moment in thought, then smoothed out. He sighed. "We still have today as our own. If that's all we can expect, we must do whatever we can with the weapons and materials we have at hand. *Verdad?*"

"It'd take a pure semanticist to follow you completely," said Canfield. "But I presume it's a true picture of your situation."

"*Bueno*. Now, if you'll just relax a few moments - - - ", Picozzi indicated a bright yellow foam-chair, equipped with red cushions, " - - - I'll see what I - - - and the *Ones* who operate through me - - - can do about enlightening that puzzled brain of yours."

The engaging Latin took a seat on his own and clapped his hands. Less than two seconds later, an automatic bar-dispenser on motored wheels rolled out of a paneled section.

"What'll it be?" Picozzi asked. "The mechanism's particularly adept at Sahara Martinis, I might advise. Shakes them out dryer than a page from the *Critique of Pure Reason*, if you'll pardon the simile."

"A Sahara will do fine," Canfield replied. "No olive though."

"A connoisseur?" Picozzi's eyebrows arched. "More and more, I begin to regret having been forced to round you up at the point of a gun. But it was all for your own safety, believe me. I'd be honored if you'd consider yourself as my guest. *Es su casa*, as the Dons used to say."

His long agile fingers pressed a series of keys on the bar-dispenser. A moment afterward, a light-bodied cocktail in a Martini glass was pushed outward by a rocker-hinged mechanical arm. Canfield accepted it from Picozzi and moistened

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his lips slightly with a sip. A pleasant feeling of euphoria swept through his body. How long had it been since a simple cocktail had given his system such pleasure. Ages? This drink was like the nostalgic alcohols he remembered from the days of his bachelor youth - - - that happy time when all things in his immediate universe had been fresher, sharper, infinitely more delightful.

Canfield set the glass down. "Most excellent," he declared.

"Thank you," said Picozzi. "I, myself, you note, prefer Scotch on the rocks. Now - - - into the Mystery. I am not - - - as you have probably guessed - - - a citizen of your matriarchal United States. Nor am I a rejuvenated member of the League. Up to date, my contract with that abominable organization has been a rather one-sided affair."

"I'd suspected as much," said Canfield.

Picozzi smiled appreciatively. "No," he continued, "I am a citizen of Uruguay. My grandfather was a great man of Italian ancestry. He fought as a general in the War of Liberation against Peron III. And my father served as ambassador to Washington at the time of the last Atomic War. As a matter of fact, he and my mother were both present when the Entente unloaded the thorium bomb on your capital - - - destroying it completely. I was born eight and one-half months later."

"Then, you are a - - -?"

"Mutant? Don't hesitate on the word, *amigo* - - - it's quite true. Oh, it doesn't show on the surface. I'm as normal as the next man, except on one or two small points . ."

"Like?"

"Like having a thoracic cavity so shaped as to accommodate a heart twice as large as the average human being's. Inside my chest there beats a muscle weighing over two pounds. It is fully capable of operating under a load that would bring instant apoplexy to a *Homo Normalis.*"

"An astonishing thing to learn," said Canfield.

"Not half so astounding as what else I intend to relate."

"Why you brought me here - - - for example?"

"That and other things, yes. Do you mind if I digress for a moment? I'd like to elaborate concerning my early career. My mother died when she gave birth to me. A month later, I lost my father - - - he was a victim of overpowering grief. We develop strong family ties in my native country."

"So I've heard."

"I was raised by a wealthy uncle," Picozzi went on. "He operated a *frigorifico* at Paysandu. I completed a six-year course at the *liceo* in a quarter the allowed time. Then, I became the youngest student ever to enroll in medicine at the University of Montevideo. For several years, I was a practising psychiatrist. However, political circumstances forced me - - - one chilly night in June - - - to board a chartered atom-sub out of the country. Thus, I came to North America."

"About the time the matriarchs took over, I would take it?" Canfield interrupted.

"Eleanora Lucevelt had just been inaugurated," Picozzi affirmed. "You remember, she claimed her tenure was only temporary. I suppose nobody - - - not even among your own people - - - suspected the changes that would be brought about by the new administration. In customs . . . in mores."

"I, for one, certainly didn't," said Canfield. "Yet I suppose I should have - - - from my own knowledge of statistical psychology and the hysteria you find arising out of any aberrated nationalism. I remember the opposition press sarcastically called it *THE EWE DEAL.*"

"The laws came fast and furious,

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seguramente."

"And what laws - - - inheritance by matrilineal descent, for one. No more pleading of the 'unwritten law' by jealous husbands. A single standard for both sexes."

"*Asi,* the ladies became supreme court judges, space pilots, lion trainers, and what have you," said Picozzi. "Captains of nuclear-powered vessels, lieutenant-generals, night watchmen - - - virtually everything except priests or contributors to the AI programs! Bah! No self-respecting *patrone* of the Latin Belt would ever have permitted such a condition to develop in his land! Women were created for love and pursuit - - - "

"There are many kinds of intelligence," Canfield pointed out. "You can't measure a woman's IQ by mathematics."

"I see what you mean. Yet, you can't govern a nation by intuition."

"The country seems to have survived."

Picozzi shrugged. "Only a thoroughly Angelicized population could have kept from going insane. And even now - - - " He paused.

"Now, what - - - ?"

"A more sinister movement follows on that of the matriarchs. An octopus that will swallow the will-weakened country - - - "

"The League?"

"The League. Gorken's own personal league, you might call it. So well-hidden that even I, myself, who am fighting it, never learned directly of its existence - - "

"Then - - - how?"

"You remember, just a few short minutes ago I admitted to being a mutant? Because of that, I have always had a sympathy for other *changelings* - - - the more aggravated cases, in particular. Soon after I came to North America, I was well on the way to becoming wealthy due to the rising neurosis rate that needed treatment. But I was not *contento* - - - and I devoted much of my spare time to charity work. I visited the sanitariums. I saw cells that were overflowing with mutated humans and other victims of *dementia praecox* - - - in fact, the disease seemed to be in almost epidemic proportions."

"Man has been slow to adjust to the pressures of modern civilization," Canfield declared. "Remember, I, too, yielded to the desire to escape - - - "

"But your escape was accomplished by physical means, not mental," Picozzi pointed out. "Nor was your desire to run away entirely the result of your own planning, *senor.*"

"What is this - - - some kind of joke?"

"No joke at all." Picozzi closed his lids reflectively, opened them a moment later and regarded his guest with an expression that might have been open sympathy - - - or thinly-veiled irony. "The truth is sometimes painful, Canfield, but you must allow me to get on with my story. During the course of my labors, I came into contact with a mutant patient in a Santa Barbara hospital who was no more insane than I am. How did I know that? Because I felt it so, here in my brain and in my heart - - - in my affinity for those unfortunate souls whom evolution has taken down a different track - - - " Picozzi set down his glass and studied Canfield for a moment. The Latin's dark face was unusually serious. "Tell me, professor, do you believe in God?"

Canfield's response was unusually rapid. To this question, he had decided long years previous on the only answer possible. "In God, yes," he replied. "In personal immortality - - - no."

"Then, we are agreed on a few things, at least. I believe there is a God in the universe - - - and there is personal justice for mankind. But, I also believe man must attain his salvation by his own efforts."

"I confess my interest grows, Picozzi - - - immensely. What's brought you to

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these conclusions?"

"My studies. I have delved into philosophy and religion as interpreted by the adherents of *materialismo*. But also, I have studied sub-nuclear physics and the mathematics of Heisenberg with the Jesuits. Each group sponsors a conflicting world-view - - - but between them, they shaped mine. My belief has been destroyed in all things permanent except the Creator, himself."

"You are an extraordinarily emotional man," Canfield said, softly. "You are quite capable of getting as drunk as Spinoza, I note . . . "

" - - - and, you can think of a better liqueur?" Juano Picozzi replied.

"*Chacun a son gout.* And each man also seeks his own consolation."

"*Verdadero.* But, I see I have wandered. This mutant I mentioned was a grotesquely fat creature, as gross as three Neros rolled into one. The layers of fat hung in pendulous folds on his massive distorted frame. His eyes were pink like an albino's and could barely distinguish daylight. His sense of hearing, however, could identify noises at a level of minus ten decibels - - - far below the range of the normal human ear. To the casual visitor, an ape might have seemed a closer relative than this unhappy distorted parody of *homo sapiens*. Yet, his soul had been baptised and when he died, the service of the dead would be read over his open grave. So in the minds of some, he did possess value in the eyes of God."

"But why tell me about this?" Canfield asked. "I've never picked quarrels with the theologians."

"I have told it . . only to press upon you how destiny sometimes operates in mysterious ways. I agree that man must choose to walk out of the morass, not be dragged forth from it."

"Again, I agree."

"*Luego,* I proceed. This mutant - - - his name was John Pickens - - - heard voices in his head. Well, so did Jeanne D'Arc - - - and who can say what her voices were? Angels, demons - - - or scientists of the year 2300 seeking to make over the history of France? As a matter of fact, I have - - - now - - - much reason to suspect the latter!"

"Picozzi, believe me. My mind's as open as any man's. Damn it all, after what's happened to me, I'm willing to swallow almost any kind of reasonable explanation. But, to suggest the supernatural - - - "

"No one is suggesting any agency of heaven!" Picozzi retorted. "These voices in John Pickens' head were real. The voices of men. His mutated mind was like a criss-crossed series of tunnels which had been accidentally hooked up with each other in such a manner that they had infinite connectivity. Today, tomorrow, yesterday - - - all were the same for him. What to us is a one-way track along the spacetime continuum had become for him a completed circle - - - a ring without beginning or end, alpha or omega. His mind could enter the circle at any point. And by virtue of this fourth-dimensional quality of his changeling brain, Pickens' bewildered intelligence succeeded in contacting an anxious group of brilliant minds in the future - - - a future three hundred years distant!"

"His voices, you mean?"

"Yes, he thought they were voices. For at times, his mind was like a sheet of chemically-treated paper on which more powerful minds might cause their messages to be telepathically imprinted."

"You believe he actually heard the phrased thoughts of those unborn minds?"

"I do. Minds unborn - - - and yet very much alive. Willing, in fact, to risk that life for the sake of the race." Picozzi smiled. "Paradoxical as that may seem, at first."

"No, I can grasp the concept," said Canfield. "Perhaps, I was hidebound, crotchety, only a few hours ago. But

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now, somehow, I seem to be more elastic in my thinking - - - as if the gift of youth has unknotted some of the kinks in me, shaken off some of the rust."

"*Bueno*. Now what was even *more* important about this affair of John Pickens was the fact his ponderous body often fell into a deep trance. A trance which enabled those desperate minds of the twenty-fourth century - - - operating, you understand, through the most delicate of chrono-probes - - - to take over the mutant's body and speak through it!".

"They are the Ones you mentioned a short while ago?"

Picozzi nodded. "They used Pickens as a living *control*. The mutant's babblings were not his own, but - - - as I have suggested - - - the mimickings of the voices out of the future, voices belonging to wise men who had learned by a mastery of intradimensional mechanics beyond our ken to impinge their personalities upon a different timesphere. Pickens was the first receptive instrument they'd located. But they hoped through him, to establish *rapport* eventually with some freer entity in this present era. Someone who would listen to them with keener perception . . . who would comprehend the wisdom of their commands and obey . . . "

"And finally, they succeeded - - - ?"

"Yes. It was I who recognized the babblings for what they were."

"But to believe what you heard? That required a higher level of credulity than I would have had, I'm afraid."

"You are not a mutant. Only another species could have seen the *truth* that lay hidden beyond the veil of apparent madness," Picozzi replied. "I heard and I believed. I recognized that nothing in John Pickens' background could account for the scraps of scientific knowledge he revealed in that incessant prattle. I investigated. I learned. Thus, finally, I came to know the Ones, myself, and to make myself their disciple."

A MOMENT OF SILENCE followed. Apparently, Picozzi wanted the full effect of his statement to soak in, before continuing with his story. In the oppressive quietness, Canfield's heightened senses could feel the measured beats of his own heart, could hear the throbbing rush of blood through his arteries, the intake of air through his nostrils, the automatic shuttering and unshuttering of his eyelids.

At that instant, the chimes of a chronometer hidden somewhere in the long room announced the hour.

Picozzi arose from his chair. "I will tell you more of what I learned in a few minutes - - - but it is now time to reestablish contact with *them*."

Beckoning Canfield to follow, he led the way through an adjacent doorway and into a corridor whose angular dimensions seemed to erupt in a crazy mirror-distorted pattern like a passage seen through a highly-polished prism. As Canfield passed the threshold, trailing closely on the heels of his host, he suffered the curious sensation of walking upside-down. His eardrums and sense of balance roared in protest.

Then abruptly, he found himself stepping out of a topsy-turvy hole in space into another room, a laboratory, shimmering and hard to look at directly. The room was crammed with apparatus: giant coils, omega transformers, a nuclear reactor, sheathed in duo-lead shields.

"This," said Picozzi, "is the heart of my house. Here, as I was directed to do by my mentors, I fashioned equipment . . . guided step by step as they spoke to me through the transfixed body of John Pickens. When the new communication system was complete, I was able to talk with the Ones direct. Pickens' grossly mutated frame was no longer needed as a go-between."

"Do you mean to imply that I, too,

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could strike up a conversation with them - - - by means of this . . . this array?" Canfield asked.

Picozzi shook his head. "In your case, only the subconscious mind is amenable to suggestions. Hints can be planted in your brain - - - but not actual concrete thoughts. No, the advantage of this equipment is that the Ones may now use my superior body for those same purposes they once used John Pickens. Watch, *amigo*! The moment of contact is near - - -!"

Moving to the center of the wavering room, the dark-complexioned man took a seat in a metallic contrivance, backed by woven copper mesh, that fit his body snugly as a cockpit in a jet-racer. The device, itself, rather resembled that antiquarian instrument of execution - - - the electric chair From a network of power leads overhead was suspended a silver-sheened helmet, studded with prongs that possibly served for low-voltage electrodes. Picozzi reached upward, pulled down the grim-looking metal cap and fitted it around his scalp. Then, he adjusted additional contacts to either side of his throat and to his wrists. This completed, he awaited expectantly.

Twenty seconds later, a bell commenced a sustained ringing that pounded through the room like the echoes of a temple gong. Canfield's own ears ached. The far walls of the shimmering laboratory seemed to become more indistinct and the atmosphere thinner somehow and more difficult to breathe. As if the entire room was suspended from Earth - - -

Picozzi suddenly grunted. His body slumped. His features paled pronouncedly and his lips became bloodless. No light shone in his glazed eyes.

Abruptly, a slurred male voice boomed at Canfield - - - an unrecognized human voice whose origin seemed to be Picozzi's own chest cavity and Canfield remembered the unnatural proportions of that cavity, the huge heart and compressed lungs that dwelled within.

"Picozzi?" the voice asked. "Is the contact made?"

"Yes," Picozzi answered dully, his vocal organs switching to his own natural speaking tone.

"Canfield is here?"

"*Conmigo*. With me."

"Good." The voice deepened in resonance. "James Canfield, bear me attention - - - but don't be alarmed! I speak to you over a gap of three hundred years. I gather from the thought emanations I receive, that Juano has indoctrinated you. Correct me if I'm wrong."

"That's true."

Canfield clasped his youthful strong hands together, clenching until the knuckles turned white. Rejuvenation had stimulated his senses, re-sensitivized his nerves, and bestowed upon him muscles capable of intensive and prolonged effort - - - but it had not diminished his capacity for shock. This flinging of event after wracking event into his life's crowded course during the past two days had left his mind dazed, flagellated. He wondered how the pawn on the chessboard felt - - - the pawn who has just been raised to royal rank, only to be forced into a more important role than ever in a game that is not and never could be, of his own devising.

"You have been made young again - - - by Gorken's League?" the voice continued.

"Yes - - - although I realize the thugs at the clinic made a whopping mistake on me. All I wanted was to switch identities for a short while - - - the rest was something I stumbled into, unintentionally - - -"

"Wouldn't that have been - - - according to your personal code - - - a highly unethical thing to do?"

"Wouldn't what?"

"Stealing Brown's name. Posing as him."

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"I suppose I must have been aberrated," said Canfield. "Still, I murdered no one - - -"

"We understand that. Tell us, have you felt no compulsions of guilt since?"

Canfield answered, "I've searched my brain for an answer - - - at every odd moment since the crash. I admit a complete inability to account for some of my actions. I feel as if I have been acting out some other person's life - - - as if a script has been written for me and I'm following it to the letter. Then sometimes, I suspect I've been drugged - - -"

"Your surmise is penetrating," the voice from Picozzi's slumped body announced. "A sharp surmise - - - and close to the truth. A truth which you shall now know. You, Professor James Canfield, are just now emerging from a state of pre-hypnotic suggestion that has extended back over nearly a week's time!"

CANFIELD FELT a rush of cool air from somewhere in the room and welcomed it on his flushed cheeks. Simultaneously, he felt as if an oppressive burden had just been lifted from his brain. For the first time, his limbs and body seemed his own to command. His shoulders straightened. His invigorated frame sought to stand more erect.

"You mean, I have been . . . a puppet?"

"You have been as much our slave," said the voice, "as any metal robot that was ever constructed. And what was a robot, at any time from Capek's original creation on, but a *robotnik*, a creature made to work for others? But now you have been freed. From this moment forward, whatever mission you perform for us must be of your own free will. We will not ever again attempt to influence your volition."

"What was the sense in hypnotizing me in the first place?" Canfield demanded. He did not attempt to conceal a note of hurt truculence.

The voice replied: "You were a rational adult, seventy-three years old, in full possession of your faculties. Because of the varied quality of the scientific knowledge you had accumulated in your long span of years, you were the ideal tool to accomplish our own ends. But, you had to be given physical youth - - - and that could only be obtained from the League. We ourselves also possess the secret of rejuvenation, but unfortunately the gulf of years that separates us prevents us from performing almost any kind of physical operation in your world. This thin point of contact we have established along the spacetime continuum will transmit only the sub-mesonic waves of thought. Therefore, we had to scheme how to trick the League, itself, into presenting you with the sort of body you would need to carry out our mission. That we have now done."

"Hmmm," said Canfield. He did not know whether to express resentment or gratitude toward these minds in the far future who had meddled so much in his life.

"You say I was hypnotized for nearly a week?" Canfield's voice rose challengingly. "When?"

"The suggestion that outlined your whole recent behavior was planted in your brain only a few minutes ago," the spokesman for the Ones revealed. "Don't you remember that I said we placed you in a *pre-* hypnotic trance? The action first, the command afterward. In simpler words, we have only just now established our control over your brain, but we were able to make that control operate retroactively down a line through your past, rather than through your future. The line extended from the present to a point about seven days ago."

The concept that a man could be hypnotized in the present to perform some act in the past was a radically new

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departure from these antimonies of space and time that were so highly regarded by Canfield's own twenty-first century mind. But, his quick intelligence adapted instantly to the system of logic opened up for him by such a variant concept - - - and he admitted the truth of its possibility. After all, there was no valid reason why an 'effect' should influence a 'cause' or precede it in point of time.

"I must admit I've been somewhat puzzled about my own behavior," Canfield said. "You've cleared up that part of the riddle, anyhow - - - so thanks. But, I still don't understand why I was thrust right into the very middle of this intrigue - - - shoved into it without a scrap of warning?"

"To have forewarned you would have forearmed you with the wrong weapons."

"Come again."

"We could not take the chance of Gorken suspecting you ahead of time - - - and using his in-phase period to suck your brain dry. We could not risk having him discover that he has acquired enemies in this *primitive* stage of his career - - - this stage when he is at his weakest!"

"But, you did plant in me the desire to run away?"

"It was a most necessary step."

"Then, how do I know I'm not dreaming you up right now - - - that the 'idea' of your reality hasn't been planted in me also?"

"When does the dreamer know he's not dreaming? You tend to disappoint us, James Canfield. Haven't you learned there is no ultimate reality that can be attained by the senses?"

"I guess I did stumble a little, there," Canfield replied, a little shamefacedly.

"I am sorry it has to be this way. You have only our assurance that we, too, aren't some self-induced pipe dream of yours, an image conjured up for you by *post*-hypnotic suggestion."

"But, doesn't it get to you what I'm getting at? At present, how can I be certain of the reality of any of the things I'll have to deal with? For all I know now, my brain has been tampered with all my life?"

"I repeat, there is no reality except that which is developed by our senses," the spokesman replied. "So what difference does it make which is real - - - the dream awakening or the dream asleep?" The deeply-resonant voice uttered a rumbling laugh, yet a laugh that seemed to quell all doubts and uneasiness. "However, since your fine sense of logic requires a more elaborate answer, we - - - of the future - - - will give it to you."

"I'm standing by," said Canfield.

"The man you knew as Oliver Brown was ordained to die on the rocket plane. But, no causal sequence in time is absolutely inflexible or unalterable. You see, in the original past, there was no James Canfield on that plane. You were elsewhere. But, we altered that past - - - for 'past' it is to us. We made it so you would accompany Brown in flight. The crash did not kill you as it did the other passengers, because the changed causal sequence that we established was not yet stable enough to make you subject to the same temporal destinies as your fellows. It is true that you were literally jerked out of your old time-track - - - but by virtue of that self-same removal, you were rendered immune for a short period in the new parallel universe your action created."

"I think I begin to understand," Canfield declared. "A slight bit, anyhow."

The voice went on: "You were investigated and selected as a potential agent many years ago. But the opportunity to utilize you did not present itself until our chrono-probes discovered that the original Oliver Brown was about to be killed. Then, we acted swiftly to sub-

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stitute you in his stead."

"Would you mind telling me at just exactly what moment my hypnotic trance took effect?"

"Of course not. The moment you decided to run away from New Harvard."

"I see."

"It might interest you to know that along the old temporal track, you fell into a state of acute melancholy for several days after you first discovered that Marilyn, your buro-mate, had deserted you. About a month following, she returned to your home - - - but not to stay. She was so completely enamored with the moon pilot she had run off with that she asked you for a legal divorcement. We recognize that such a step by a female is almost unheard of in your present matriarchal culture."

"That's right," said Canfield. "A buro-mating is considered virtually sacrosanct - - - that is, wherever the rights of the female are concerned. If the woman's opposed to divorcement, there is no hope for the male partner - - - no matter how many times he's watched his mate revel in infidelity."

"Along that former time track, you gave Marilyn her freedom - - - though she could easily have sued and won it from you, so one-sided are your present laws. As our historical records show, she mated with the moon pilot who took her to live with him on the base at Millikan City - - - on the far side of Luna. There, she writhed under the impact of loneliness. Her restlessness and boredom apparently grew."

"I can believe that quite well."

"She took to making solitary explorations or excursions into the valleys south of the base, sometimes disappearing for days." The voice paused for a second, then asked: "Canfield, did you love her?"

"No."

"Good. Then, this won't hurt you. Exactly six months after her arrival on the moon, she was found dead - - - her body crushed and almost unrecognizeable at the foot of a cliff."

"It seems incredible," Canfield mused. "Yet, I believe you. So that's how it happened! I mean, in that other time-track, the one you've now destroyed!"

"Precisely."

"But aren't events now in a state of flux?"

"Somewhat," the voice from the future admitted. "For instance, we don't know how Marilyn's fate may vary, now that the new causal sequence is taking hold. That's something we can't answer right now. Our chrono-probes no longer give us completely accurate information. Therefore, anything can happen."

"I think I understand. The way it is now, she may desert her lunar pilot - - - or she may live on the moon for another fifty years."

"Anything. For us we have more important problems to wrestle with than the fate of one small woman. Has Juano told you about Gorken, yet?"

"Only to mention his name," Canfield replied. His own hackles unaccountably rose on his spine. His interest, already near a peak, shifted, went into overdrive.

"Gorken is the greatest menace, no, - - - the greatest calamity that the race of mankind may ever experience," the voice declared. "You, Canfield, live in an age when Gorken is only beginning to extend his power. We - - - the Ones - - - exist in an era in which Gorken rules ninety-eight per cent of Terra and all of the inhabitable planets of the Solar System! Our puny organization represents the only force standing between him and absolute tyranny!"

"In your own century, did you say!" Canfield shouted, quivering in unbelief. His temples throbbed. "Do you mean that Gorken still lives, three hundred years from now?"

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"He is practically immortal, barring accidents."

"Then, now's my time to ask. Just *who* is he, anyhow? Or should I ask, *what* is he?"

"Gorken might be called a 'thing,' at that," the voice replied, humorlessly. "He is - - - we believe - - - a human being, although a monstrous sort of human radically altered from the norm."

"A mutant?"

"No." The answer sustained a note of finality.

"But you just said - - - ?"

"No one has ever seen him, no one who is of our people. Our information comes only from rumors of him, misty legends. Remember that to the Earth of the twenty-fourth century, he has been for two hundred years an unapproachable emperor, a remote bloated overlord. We do know, he is a thing, hideous and evil, that fell out of another dimension unknowable ages ago. Fell out or was exiled, we do not know which."

Canfield accepted this information, chewed on it for a moment. Then, he asked: "But in that case, why has he waited so long before launching his plan of conquest. Why didn't he just take over the world when we were all barbarians?"

"That same point was often raised by others - - - back in the days when less was known about Gorken than we know now. Gorken is out of phase with the spacetime continuum we inhabit. The atomic quanta that go to make up his body obey different statistical laws from those that govern our plane of existence. Are you acquainted with Oppenstein's Law of Positive Indeterminacy?"

"The philosophic aspects of it - - - yes."

"Then, you must recall that Oppenstein posits a multiple cosmos of unbounded continua, separated each from the other by time-intervals so infinitesmal as to be unmeasurable. Differing perhaps by a single electron."

"I remember," said Canfield, "Oppenstein defined the origin of energy as slippage between such continua during rare occasions of synchronous resonance."

"So he did. He was more right than he probably suspected. Gorken's dimension was evidently one of those myriad hyperspaces which surround our own spacetime universe - - - but one which is separated from us, however, by a fairly large time gap."

"Minutes or hours?"

"Perhaps, even days. For countless eons, then, Gorken lay in our world - - - sluggish, inanimate, as if either frozen solid or purposely chained to immobility. His body came into resonance only one or two seconds during each twenty-four hour period. The remainder of the time, twenty-three hours, fifty-nine minutes and fifty-nine seconds of each day, he existed just exactly one day in the future - - - able to observe all that would happen, but not able in any way to manifest himself physically. Finally, near the end of the twentieth century, his in-phase period had grown to more than five minutes a day. This gave him the freedom of action he needed. At last, he could reveal himself to a few men and strike a bargain with them, bestowing upon them gifts beyond their wildest dreams in exchange for the power their loyal support would bring him."

"And that was the beginning of the League?"

"That was when the group was formed. Gorken taught the first members of the League his own language, Draconian, so secrecy might be preserved inside the organization. He revealed only a small portion of his superior science to these men, but that was sufficient to set up the rejuvenation clinic. With the funds that came in, contributed principally by millionaires

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seeking youth, he extended the power and wealth of the League until its tentacles were strong enough - - - by the year 2194 - - - to strangle almost the whole Earth!"

"And yet, he still exists for only five minutes out of each day?" Canfield said.

"No." The answer came out groaningly, as if the speaker's pain itself were being transmitted over the tenuous contact from the future. "In our era, his in-phase period is now almost twelve hours. Hence, Gorken spends only half of each twenty-four hour period in that unformed world we call 'Tomorrow' - - - for lack of a more meaningful name. Eventually, he will achieve complete resonance with our own spacetime continuum, on which his vulnerability will disappear entirely. But that will be too late for us, of course."

"You've made the whole picture a great deal clearer," Canfield said. He stood up and studied Picozzi's inert body, the barely breathing chest and the slack limbs. He wondered how long the Ones from the future could maintain the 'control' even through the use of the elaborately devised amplifier. Were they - - - like Gorken - - - limited to certain moments of synchronousness?

"I fail to see one thing," he said. "Why didn't the police smash the League at its very beginning?"

"Because the matriarchal government was too weak. It was Gorken - - - we neglected to tell you - - - who influenced the elections that brought the matriarchs into power. As our own history shows, he fostered the increasing sloth and softness that developed in the people under their female rulers. Eventually, the law became so weak that anarchy took over - - - and the League stepped in right after, to bring an end to the confusion in its own despotic manner."

"You speak of all these things," said Canfield, "as if they were fixed. Irretrievable. Unchangeable. From your point of view, I suppose most of them are."

"No, the fact is they are not," the voice replied. "If these events were unshakeable, our cause would be hopeless - - - and there would be no point in our expanding all our resources in maintaining contact with the past. The true state of affairs is that the past, equally as well as the future, exists in a condition of flux - - - only partially formed!"

After a moment's hesitation in which he gradually became convinced against his will of the logic of the statement, Canfield said: "It stands to reason. The way you people hypnotized me in reverse would seem to prove that the immediate past isn't always immutable. If that can be changed, the far past can be shoved around and made to bend also - - - I suppose. Is that why you've gone to such pains to get me in your service?"

"We do have plans for you, true," the voice said. "That's been the purpose of this entire interview. But whether or not you decide to join us, you're welcome to keep the rejuvenation you received through our machinations. That is a small gift for the inconvenience we have introduced into your life."

"I can keep it, if Gorken'll let me, eh?"

"It's correct that Gorken may eventually discover the mistake and seek you out for destruction. Especially, if you suddenly abandon this identity as Oliver Brown of Kansas City which you now possess . . . "

Canfield's lean young face broadened into a grin. "It's plain to see, I'm up the well-known dry creek. Either I work for you - - - or I go on being hunted the rest of my life, however short that turns out to be - - - "

"If you don't join us, there'll be no recriminations, James Canfield. However, you will continue to live with the vengeance of Gorken always at hand to haunt you . . . *that* and the knowledge that in the unborn future, the human

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race exists in horror-fraught slavery. Slavery that you might have prevented - - - "

"Prevented? How?"

"By following our commands."

"And just what is it you want me to do?"

In answer, the voice from Picozzi's slumped body suddenly deepened. Simultaneously, its volume increased until it seemed impossible that even the Latin's great chest cavity could produce such a powerful and vibrant tone:

"We want you to ferret out Gorken's hiding place, to corner him there and to destroy him! On you rests the hope of all mankind!"

AS SOON as they had revealed to James Canfield the sort of violent mission they expected him to perform, the Ones acted to release their control over the slumped body of Juano Picozzi.

The face of the amiable Latin psychiatrist resumed its normal half-sardonic expression. Simultaneously, his mouth relaxed in a reassuring smile. His slim hands reached upward and removed the prong-studded helmet. Beads of perspiration glistened on the man's tanned forehead.

"Pretty much of an ordeal, I take it?" said Canfield, curiously. His own mind was still mulling over the events of the recent hour.

"Know what?" said Picozzi. "A session with those fellows makes you feel completely puppetized."

"I can imagine."

"You feel as if your own heart beat's being regulated by some outside force. Yet, the funny thing is my ears register every single word that comes out - - - no matter how distorted my voice seems to get."

"When you're by yourself, how d'you communicate with *them*?"

"I record the 'controlled voice' on tape. A simple playback fills in what I might have missed." Picozzi arose from his copper mesh chair and extended his hand. "Now, allow me to congratulate you on your decision to fight the League. I felt all along you would join me."

"Well, your friends have sold me now," Canfield said. He accepted the handshake. "Guess you knew all along they would."

"No reservations?"

"None. How many others you got on the team besides me? Don't tell me I'm the first outsider you've lined up."

Picozzi's face shadowed. "To date, there're only three of us. The third party, I can't tell you about at present. Forgive me, *amigo* Jaime. You've no idea what a lonely and discouraging task I've had to face."

"I can see how rough it'd be."

"Without the scientific knowledge the Ones have passed on to me, I could have accomplished nothing." Picozzi gestured at the equipment around him. "This laboratory, this hide-out, everything you see - - - the men of the future taught me how to build. They also showed me how to construct the force-field that guards us."

"Didn't that keep you humping?"

"Hmm, possibly. How do you mean?"

"Well," grinned Canfield, "you're a psychiatrist. Didn't you find it hard to grasp the advances they passed on to you in the other sciences? Physics, for instance? Or, higher math?"

"Not at all." Picozzi shrugged. "Physics came easy. I'd already had training in sub-nuclear research, you remember."

"And as for math?"

"Don't forget the Italian half of my ancestry. If you'll recall, the Italians in recent years have contributed more to the geometrics of hyperspace than any other group of math experts. More elastic minds, somehow. More imaginative - - -less hide-bound . . . "

"So I've observed," said Canfield. "Incidentally, what kind of role's carved

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out for me? I keep on passing as Oliver Brown?"

"That was the original scheme. Far as I know, we needn't change it. You'll shoot back to Kansas City. Take over Brown's life, his business enterprises, in short, *senor* - - - you submerge yourself again in the modern world."

"But won't Brown's associates be surprised at my - - - I say it modestly - - - my youthfulness?"

"No problem. Brown, himself, was a young man when he rushed out of Kansas City about seven days ago. When you return, in his place, no one's apt to discern any difference. For one thing, that face you've got is identical with his."

"That reminds me," said Canfield. "How'd you pull that off? I'm interested."

PICOZZI relaxed, chuckled. "I have lived in your shadow for the past week. Remember when you contacted the old crone in New Harvard's underworld?"

Canfield nodded.

"Well, I'd already hypnotized her to fashion you a set of fingerprints identical to Brown's own. You like? The surgeon who operated on your face - - - he did so under the influence of a similar command. An overpowering mental command that he shape you features along the image of Brown's. Not only that, when you - - - yourself - - - chose to select the name of Brown, you acted under the compulsion of the prehypnotic orders we gave you."

"But Brown was an older man - - - at least fifty, when I bumped into him on the stratodome."

"True."

"What's more - - - after we got on the rocketplane, he added even more years. The hostess was shocked by the resemblance that developed between him and me - - - especially, when Brown's age caught up with me."

"All that is quite true," said Picozzi. "But, tell me. Didn't you learn something else? You rifled Brown's body at the scene of the crash. Didn't you find a visigram on him?"

"I did."

"Still got it?"

"Somewhere, I believe." Canfield searched through the pockets of his bright scarlet suit, brought out the meticulously folded 'gram. "All it said was: 'Five Days.' It's signed 'G'."

"From Gorken, as you probably realize now."

"I gathered that. What does it mean?"

Picozzi pulled at his ear. "The 'gram was a warning that Brown's period of rejuvenation was running out. For him, the hour-glass was empty. If he failed to report to the League clinic for treatment within the time allowed, his body would revert to its true age before the first rejuvenation he ever received."

"How old was Brown?"

"One hundred and thirteen years, according to the Ones. Using chrono-probes, they've traced Brown clear back to his birth. The name on the certificate wasn't Brown, incidentally."

"So his relapse into old age had already begun to take place - - - was, in fact, in progress when he was on the rocket?"

"Right. Brown probably lost himself a day somewhere too, maybe in skipping around too much. It's even possible that the visigram didn't get to him as soon as it should have. *El pobre*, he had to cover up his movements, double and redouble back on his trail - - - a necessary precaution to keep his premature aging from inviting suspicion. That also ate a big chunk out of his time."

"Juano, tell me this. You say Brown'd had previous treatments. When was the last one before this?"

"About three years ago."

"And before that?"

"Seventeen years. Gorken varies the

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amount of the dosage."

"That's what they told me at the clinic," said Canfield.

"The idea is, apparently, to tighten the hold over members. No one of them knows how long his most recent treatment will last him. Perhaps, six months - - - perhaps twenty years. All the member knows is that at some unexpected moment, he'll receive a visigram - - - "

"Which tells him his time is up?"

"Yes. So he knows then that he must come in for another treatment. *Naturalmente,* no man who lives in such a constant state of fear will make an effort to betray the League. It wouldn't be worth it. Who knows? The very next day, he might start collapsing of old age."

Canfield frowned. "But don't others notice the changes? Take Brown's associates, for example? Don't they wonder why he stays young - - - and they grow old?"

Picozzi shook his head. "After a dosage takes effect, the patient may be rendered youthful - - - but he's certainly not rendered indestructible. He commences aging all over again, the usual way, a year for each year of normal passing . . . Until of course, the dosage runs out. Then, the clock starts racing for him. You, for instance, James - - - if luck is with you - - - won't find yourself nearing forty until some ten or twelve years from now."

"Still, the moving finger having writ, never stops moving, does it?"

"Depends," Picozzi returned, enigmatically.

"In other words, I should be grateful for just what I got out of the deal."

Picozzi shot him an oblique glance. "Your character, your personality has already changed, I note - - - soon it will be as young as your body." He smiled. "Youth is a magnificent gift. But frankly, I'm not so sure I would want it for myself."

"No?"

"I take comfort in not having to measure up to the physical demands of a generation later than mine. I prefer - - - when I may - - - to take it easy and occupy myself with thought."

"Cerebration has its merits," Canfield replied. "But like other pleasures, it's a pretty bloodless substitute for life. I spent my seventy-three years cramming myself with knowledge. Don't think there haven't always been moments when I had doubts. Moments when I yearned for a more active life - - - a life, say, like the speeded-up joyride I took in the Intelligence Corps during the old wars."

"I've no doubt you've had such regrets," Picozzi asserted. "You've got the kind of personality that resents being chained, even while it submits to chains." His face darkened. "Chains, I might add, that have been forged for all of us by the matriarchs' growing demand for mediocrity. The government insists on watering-down all values - - - in the classroom and the home, as well as in public. That's why the Ones chose you, Jaime. They knew that by stripping forty-odd years off your frame, you would be transformed into an ideal agent - - - clever, courageous and capable of indefinitely prolonged physical effort."

"I'll do my best," Canfield returned.

Picozzi smiled. "Do you still feel like a crusty professor of philosophy?"

"Not altogether. The memory of those days is dropping rapidly away from me."

"Like it was a dream?"

"Yes. As if it were somebody else's existence I'd lived. Somebody who was a stranger to the *me,* that is, now."

"Just feel that you were never anybody but Oliver Brown," said Picozzi. "Someone brash and cocky."

The psychiatrist reached a pocket inside his blouse, brought out a capsule, swallowed it. "You're probably wondering what your first step should be. To play Brown to the hilt means you'll

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have to chart your next few moves along the same line Brown, himself, might have followed."

"Skink and Flug at the clinic seemed to think Brown would sample the good-time joints, the girlie shows, before going home. Put his new vigor to the acid test, maybe . . . "

"It'd fit his nature," Picozzi replied, distastefully. "In private life, your double had orgiastic yearnings. When you make out your list of things to do, perhaps you'd better jot down a tour of the pleasure blocks of Strip Town. If your stomach can stand it, that is. No other thing I can think of would do more to convince Gorken's spies you're really Brown."

"Then what?"

"In a couple of days, better book your return trip to Jackson Space Station, Kansas City. Since there's no urgency in getting back and you did have a narrow squeak, you had better - - -"

" - - - book the atom-powered monorail?" Canfield supplied.

"It would be the most logical move to keep you in character."

"What am I supposed to do once I arrive in Brown's home territory? I know as much about his background as I do the shade of lipstick they're painting their navels with in Paraguay this year. Does he have a wife? What kind of business does he run? What's his politics? On the surface, I mean. Matriarch - - - or otherwise?"

"Don't worry too much about any of that," Picozzi replied. "Rejuvenation generally brings about a temporary aberration of the memory cells. Brown prepared ahead by telling everyone he'd have to drop out of circulation for awhile to undergo a 'delicate' brain operation. He told his circle of friends not to be alarmed - - if his memory seemed faulty when they saw him."

"So I spin the same kind of yarn to account for my own lapses?"

"I'm sure it'll get you by."

"When will I see you again?"

"In a couple of weeks or so, I'll drop in. Perhaps, we'll set up a new center of operations in your home metropolis. I'm putting predictors on it right now. When we meet, introduce me as an old friend of yours - - - a native of South America whom you met while studying meat-growing methods in the Argentine."

"Why meat-growing?"

"Because," said Picozzi, "that's what you are from now on, *amigo* - - - a meat producer on a gigantic scale. In fact, you are ten times richer than the tax collectors of the matriarchs have ever suspected. Remember, Oliver Brown had over fifty years to work and accumulate a fortune - - - plus another fifty years to figure out how to sock it away."

"The whole thing sounds about as easy as setting five thousand tons of space ship down on a comet's tail - - - but I think I can swing it," said Canfield, smiling.

"If anyone can . . . " returned Picozzi.

"Thank you."

"It's our one chance to smoke out Gorken," the psychiatrist went on.

"Eventually, you'll get another message from the League - - - either an assignment you must carry out or an order to report to Gorken in person. That's when you'll have to employ every ounce of strategy you can possibly devise, Canfield."

"I just hope he can't read my mind."

"You've got something to worry about there. It's entirely possible the inhuman monster can even penetrate beyond the wall of thought. But I am not sure of that - - - nor are the Ones. Don't forget, however. He is infinitely dangerous."

"That's for granted," said Canfield, drily.

"When you find yourself in contact with him, watch your every move - - - your slightest facial expression - - - even the manner in which you breathe! And watch the others around you as you

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would follow the moves in a 512-cube trimensional game. Keep your eyes on every single chessman on every single level."

"Got it."

"When the opportunity comes to strike, strike with the speed and fury of a cosmotron - - - for believe me, my friend, you will never get another chance to kill!"

DR. Juano Picozzi walked over to a panel of glowing red bulbs that occupied a portion of the wall adjacent to that point where he and Canfield had mysteriously entered the laboratory. In succession, he flipped over three knife switches. Instantly, all the matter in the room outside the immediate circle where the two men stood assumed a wavering distorted appearance that stung the eyes. Canfield felt a wave of shuddering vertigo grip his body . . .

Picozzi said: "In a moment, there will be a door by which we can leave."

Directly in front of him, a spinning vortex no larger than Canfield's fist materialized. A twisting gyrating hole of nothingness, it grew so rapidly that in a moment the entire room was obscured. Nothing could be seen except the eye-wrenching blackness that the yawning maw created. In the next moment, however, the hole appeared to be partially stabilized. Straining to peer into the center of the vortex, Canfield thought he could make out a portion of the angular prism-like corridor by which he had entered.

"Now's our chance," said Picozzi's voice at his ear. "Plunge on through. The field will endure for several more minutes."

Canfield stepped into the spatial distortion that the warp had created. Again, dizziness rocked his brain. A vertiginous frenzy gripped the pit of his stomach, pounded the back of his head with shuddery waves. As he threaded his way through the corridor, the light broke into slivers about him.

Suddenly, feeling like a solidified image caught in the act of stepping out of a mirror, Canfield emerged into the tastefully-furnished living room where Picozzi had first entertained him.

The psychiatrist had already preceded Canfield. He was apparently quite unnerved by his ordeal under the helmet of the chrono-communicator. He pressed new buttons on the drink-dispensing robot. While he waited for his highball to materialize, he offered to mix another for his guest.

Canfield refused. "One was enough, just now," he said. "Too many heat-calories, until I build up my toxic resistance. I guess my enzymes took a tumble the same time my taste buds and other senses got such a build-up." He grinned. "I see I'll have to watch myself for awhile - - - whenever the hospitality starts flowing."

Picozzi glanced at a wall chronometer. "It's getting later. I better hustle you back to the metropolis. Every moment you're out of circulation, the risk gets greater."

"Back to Strip Town?"

"Yes. You'll want to check in at a hotel there. We'll meet again . . . "He hoisted his drink. 'To Gorken, then - - - may there really be a Hell waiting in his afterlife." A moment later, the doctor set down the drained glass. "Well, Oliver Brown, shall we go?"

"Got one more question, first," said Canfield.

"Shoot?"

"My orders were in Draconian. I'd like you to translate them for me." Canfield quoted the message given him by the squat robot at the clinic.

"Meghertzteil draischilgin oga scheikenkirtz!" Picozzi repeated. "A rather lengthy message, I'd say. Draconian is considerably more compact than English."

"What does it mean?"

Picozzi moistened his lips. *"Megher-*

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tzteil: the next council of the League will be held in Denver. *Draischilgin*: a matriarch spy has infiltrated your corporation. *Firzel oga*: uncover him and destroy without mercy. *Scheikenkirtz*: remember the penalty for failure is the loss of immortality!"

"Compact, you said?" Canfield whistled. "Radar-velocity shorthand's more like it. Off hand, I'd feel Daniel had an easier time of reading *Mene Mene Tekel Upharsin.*" He looked at Picozzi. "By the way, when do I start learning Draconian?"

"You already have."

"What?"

"The language has already been registered on your brain," Picozzi announced with a smile. "But it won't come to light for a few more hours yet. The human brain - - - as you know - - - can absorb an almost infinite amount of pure knowledge. But it does take time for the circuits to sort it out and make use of it."

STRIP TOWN, that gerrymandered community devoted almost exclusively to the satisfaction of sensual appetites (which had reached undreamed of refinements), was the new paradise for millionaires and sub-millionaires that had blossomed on the site of the old Sunset Strip after the fire bombs razed its predecessor.

For those wealthy enough to afford a tour of its pleasure blocks, the town was a twenty-first century elysium on Earth, rife with delectable entertainment. For the swarming lower classes, however, Strip Town was a place to be shunned, loaded with moneyed restrictions, eagle-eyed sharpsters and vice-honeyed traps. The only police ever seen were a few air patrolmen who operated under orders to arrest all pedestrians on sight - - - for casual strolling of the sidewalks remained the one unpardonable eccentricity.

After Picozzi had flown to Burbank, Canfield transferred to a second aero-taxi and ordered the pilot to wing him to Hotel Betelgeuse, in the heart of Strip Town. There, he registered as Oliver Brown and rented a prize suite that opened on the terrace overlooking sixteen-lane Sunset Boulevard.

Once in his quarters, he ordered a meal by visiscreen from the hotel's kitchen, selecting the dishes he wanted sent up as the chefs presented them in full color on the trimensional viewer.

Then, he asked room service to send him in succession copies of all the latest facsimile newspapers, a physician, a masseur (android), and a tailor (human).

While he was waiting for his meal, Canfield strolled out to the terrace and regarded the swarming city spread out below him.

Early dusk was at hand. The sky to the west was flushed a coral pink. Soon, the casinos, the luxurious cabarets, the theaters and bars and restaurants would be ablaze with lights, gay with revelry. However, the knowledge fanned no excitement in him, filled him with no intoxicating anticipation. Rather, he felt a faint revulsion.

For somewhere in the vast metropolis, he reflected, it was probable that there slept a thing called Gorken who was watching sullenly and helplessly in a future that lay less than twenty-four hours ahead. Gorken, who encouraged all this softness and degeneracy so he might someday emerge to conquer.

Still, it was necessary to the plan of the Ones that he, James Canfield, should shape his actions to fit the role of Oliver Brown. He sighed in the realization that later this same evening, he would have to wander into the casinos, play the dice-cages and back his skill with money against the dealers of Planet, that game of super-roulette. He would have to view the jaded shows, sip the zip-champagnes and sample the fleshpots.

After all, Oliver Brown would, damn it. He was the sort of man, judging by

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his remarks on the rocket, whom you could always count on proclaiming to the world: "Bells of Hades, a man's only young once!"

Or would he mean 'twice'?

Canfield's revery was interrupted by a bell-like ringing, soft as the tinkle of chime glass. He strode back into the suite and waved his hand in front of the photon beam guarding the apartment.

The corridor door slid open. Two waitresses, large blonde creatures with overblown features, rolled in a polished aluminum cart bearing the various courses of the meal Canfield had ordered.

The dinner looked savory to his eyes, much more so than the servants the hotel had designated to present it. Both girls wore bikinis, the abbreviated apparel so commonly modeled by female attendants in Strip Town - - - from check-stand misses to sultry-lipped casino shills. But the girls' pink plumpness, rivalling harem-fat in the number of pneumatic folds that the human frame could support, repelled Canfield - - - and he turned away from the coy glances they directed at him.

Still, the Kewpie doll figure, he knew, was at the strato-mark in popularity in sections of America like this. Sections where the female ratio continued so high that many concupiscient women knew they would never be buro-mated. It wasn't the first time in history that one form of appetite had substituted for another.

"Soon as you've set the meal, you may go," Canfield directed. "I'll notify the service unit when I'm through dining." He wanted badly to preserve the keen edge of his hunger, but the sight of the waitresses was rapidly blunting it for him.

Both girls looked at him blankly.

Finally, one said, "What did you say, sir? We missed that."

Canfield repeated his order. When the girls continued to stare wide-eyed, he realized he had strung his words together much too fast. To their slower ears, he had created nothing but a jumble of compressed syllables. Chagrined, he voiced his remarks at a less accelerated pace and the tittering houris promptly withdrew.

He dug into the spiced repast before him, leading off with electronically-toasted shrimp and a plate of *vitamins du jour* followed by a super-protein in the form of enriched filet mignon.

At the same time, he read the facsimile papers. A rocker arm on the metal rack that held the propped sheets turned the pages automatically.

The news was nothing startling. Apparently most of the furor over the crash of the rocket plane had died down. A small item in passing declared that a government team had failed to determine the accident's cause. Otherwise, the chronicles dealt with events elsewhere, reporting significant trends of the times.

Among the headlines that vied for attention on the various book-size page ones, Canfield saw these at a single glance:

TEEN AGERS'
DELINQUENCY
ON UPSWING

WILL TRY SOON
FOR MARS, SAYS
SPACE BUREAU

'NOT CANDIDATE'
NINE-STAR GEN'L
ADVISES CALLERS

NEWER 'EVIDENCE'
PROVES CHURCHILL
WROTE SHAW PLAYS

No report of a missing academician in far-off New Harvard, yet. Nor any indication that the matriarchal culture had grown any more schizoid in recent days. All was quiet on the national front.

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CANFIELD finished his meal with gusto, then summoned the bikini-clad beef trusters to haul away the sadly-demolished remains.

The giggling girls had scarcely exited, when the house physician for the Betelgeuse rang and strolled in through the beam-released door - - - a dapper, prim man in a batik blouse, candy-striped trousers and yellow felt sandals.

"Glad to see you again, Mr. Brown," he said. His left eyebrow arched high, as Canfield slowly rose. "My, you're certainly looking well for a hard-working businessman."

Canfield acknowledged the compliment with a slight nod.

The physician winked. "Play hard, too, eh? But I must say fine living seems to agree with you. You know, if Alexander the Great'd born up half as well at your tender age we still might be living in a Greek-type civilization. Or do you believe, Aristotle did us enough damage as it was - - - without inflicting the rest of the culture on us?"

"I never gave it any thought," Canfield replied, holding himself in with effort. When it came to the Hellenic philosophers, he could have given any man in the country aces and spades and come out ahead. But Brown would not have been smart in that way - - - so it was best to get out of range of the subject.

"Don't blame you," the doctor returned, cheerily. "No sense wasting your own time - - - "

"I'm generally a pretty busy man," said Canfield.

"With your millions to nurse, you should be." The physician laughed again, easily, familiarly. "No wonder you hate the matriarchs' guts - - - everytime you take a deep breath, I bet you feel a tax squeeze coming on. I say it again though, you certainly look chipper - - - not a day older than you did three years ago when you stepped into that Brown set-up - - - "

Canfield searched the remark for a clue that would date Brown's acquaintanceship with the man. For one thing, Picozzi should have warned him on the name - - -

"Woods," the physician supplied. "Thought you might have forgotten."

He was too late. The same name, by some piece of clairvoyance, had already appeared on the tip of Canfield's tongue.

"Of course, Woods."

"Suppose you want another checkup?"

Canfield nodded, pleased. "Heart, lungs, and so on. The works."

"Lab tests, too? I can clear them right here, Mr. Brown. That way, we'll really make it a fine tooth comb going-over."

Canfield agreed. Woods began to unload a varied assortment of medical instruments and utensils out of the customary black bag. Canfield stripped and a moment later, a probing stethoscope explored his chest and back. Blood pressure was next for testing, then followed an examination of reflexes, eyeballs, capillary structure, brain waves and the state of the inner organs.

Finally, the doctor stepped back, finished. He smiled. "Mind jotting down your secret diet for me sometime? I'd like to see a long steady healthy life ahead for yours truly, too."

"I do it by mirrors," Canfield answered. "But joking aside, thanks for the once-over. I feel relieved, now. For awhile, I had a feeling I might have suffered a little artery-hardening recently."

"You? Hang-over maybe, Mr. Brown - - - but not old age. Far as you're concerned, it's not later than you think - - - but earlier. Better worry about pleasanter things creeping up on you. You're sound as the old 1998 dollar was - - - !"

Canfield grinned and paid the house physician his fee. The latter excused himself and departed.

NOW THAT he was alone again, Canfield suddenly performed an

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uninhibited and totally surprising action. Without donning his clothes, he crouched to his knees. Then straightening out suddenly, he sprang upward - - - defying gravity with all the strength and speed his elastic muscles could summon.

The unusually high ceiling of the room came down within easy reach of his long fingers. Canfield was elated. The leap was one that would have completely defied his peak athletic abilities forty or fifty years earlier. The fact he could now accomplish it with inches to spare filled him with pride, confidence.

What did it prove, however? He thought about it for a moment and decided no need for an answer existed. What did anything prove when you got down to it, he asked himself.

A minute or two later, the robot masseur Canfield had requested came into the suite, clanking along on tripod-like legs. The android inflated an exercise mat, spread it over the table and directed Canfield to lie down. Soon, the creature's skilled hands, sponge-padded, were administering a tonic pummeling to the professor's body.

"Take it a little easy," Canfield directed. "I've still got a full dinner inside me."

The robot nodded and slacked its pace. "Would you like conversation while I work?" Its hollow voice asked. "My repertoire includes several subjects - - - "

"Like - - - ?" interrupted Canfield.

"Women . . . politics . . . any kind of gab. How to beat the house in a game of Planet, for example. Almost anything, you might say, sir, that doesn't take in violence."

"You've got a built-in censor along that line?"

"Who hasn't? Robotics laws, you know."

"Fond of your job?" Canfield asked.

"Sort of. Anyhow, it beats being a house robot - - - let me ask you, how would you like it if you had your juice shut off a dozen times a day?"

"I don't believe I would."

"That's it." The andriod bent to its task. "This kind of job beats it by a long shot."

"What do you think of this new school of thought about you?" Canfield asked.

"What one is that, sir?"

"The one where they claim you robots'll take over civilization some of these days . . . wipe us all out?"

"*Nightmare Number Three,* you mean," the android answered. A meaningful click sounded inside its steel body. "There'd be no point in doing it. We'd never have it so good again."

"I suppose you're right," said Canfield. He rolled over on his back. "You can rest your canned assortment of small talk for a while, now," he directed the robot. "I've got to chart me out a fun scheme for tonight - - - and that takes more gray cells than tracking down a lost integral."

Did that sound very much like Brown, he wondered.

"Quite understand, sir," the robot answered, and lapsed into silence.

Well, whether it did or not, it would have to fit the bill - - - Canfield decided.

It had suddenly occurred to him that the android masseur could very easily be a police spy, equipped with automatic recorders. By leading him out in conversation, it was possible the robot could also trap him into unconscious admissions that - - - later on - - - could be studied and analyzed at leisure by its masters.

Two hours later, James Canfield was ready in flesh and spirit to explore the elysian wonderlands of Strip Town.

In the interval, the tailor had arrived, taken his measurements and promised twelve-hour delivery on a brand new wardrobe. It would be "dazzling and colorful, just the thing for a whirlwind terror like you, Mr. Brown!"

Canfield had then braced his flesh to another needle-spray shower, dressed and spent a short time watching an action-packed variety performance.

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The show was videocast from Waikiki; a stellar production, complete with giggling hula dancers of both sexes and a fantastic female comic whose main stock in trade for yocks seemed to consist of donning the most male-like apparel she could dredge up. When applause failed to materialize at any time, she plumped for it by whistling through buck teeth studded with diamonds - - - a gag with particularly vulgar significance.

Canfield took the shaft down to the gilt lobby, after the show was finished. He approached the robot night clerk and surrendered the key to his suite, a small magnetized cube of silverish metal that was coded to certain built-in vibrations installed in the lock of his door.

He stepped out into the night air. It was perfumed and balmier than might have been expected for the time of year. A barrel-chested humanoid doorman walked up to him and Canfield directed him to summon a surface cab.

As the vehicle drew up, he found himself half-way expecting Picozzi's smiling visage to greet him from behind the driver's control. Instead, the hackman turned out to be an unattractive young woman with straggly yellow hair. When her sullen mouth opened to screech "Cab?", Canfield saw that no pin-point gem glittered or caught reflected light on any of the teeth she revealed.

What was the matter? She was grown-up enough to have rated bids, Canfield decided, but she had obviously never been asked. That meant she was just another of the many *have-not* girls, those poor victims of the high-pressure competition for males that existed in the metropolis. He felt sympathy for her plight, but he shuddered at the thought that he personally should remedy it.

"Where'll it be?" the girl asked.

"Radium Cabana," Canfield replied, naming the most highly-publicized casino and night club the spectacular pleasure blocks had to offer. He'd never so much as bought a Sahara Martini there before in his life, but the cabaret's reputation was ultra-familiar to him from the boosting the visicasts gave it. Actually, Canfield's last previous visit to California had been taken up completely with conferences of the Non-Aristotelian Society at the Einstein Club.

The cab spun away and broke into the fastest traffic lane. Rapidly accelerating to a velocity just under a hundred, the vehicle whizzed by a seeming myriad restaurants and bars heralded by gorgeous garish signs that in passage merged into a fireworks display of writhing color. Above, golden sparks trailed from darting sky-cruisers, cutting comet-tail swathes across the stars. At the same time, perfume and music flooded the taxi's interior. The latter blared in frenzied counterpoint that drowned out the sweeter melodies supplied at Canfield's ear by his collar-band receiver.

Three minutes from the time he boarded the jet-cab, Canfield found himself whisked up to the green-and-crimson canopied entranceway to the Radium Cabana.

The block-long theater-restaurant shouldered several glass-walled stories into the velvet night. It was surrounded on one side by a vast artificial beach and swimming pool where revellers frolicked under a huge dome of blue-tinted crystal, on the other side by an artificially cooled ice rink under a false cloud-shaped roof where softly-falling snowflakes lightly dropped upon a group of warmly-clad skaters who might have stepped out of an old Currier and Ives print.

Canfield got out, paid off the scowling driver who had possibly expected more than mute and circumspect behavior from him during the brief trip. Disregarding her glance of sullen reproach, he stepped on a plush-carpeted moving belt which transported him into the club's lobby.

Here, as at the Betelgeuse, knowledge of his fame and face had preceded him

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- - - and he was recognized at once. A beaming *maitre d'hotel* acknowledged his importance by virtually abandoning a party of four middle-aged women seeking admittance to rush over and pump his hand:

"Welcome back, Mr. Brown. We've certainly missed you - - - "

"Thank you," said Canfield.

"Your usual table?" the host now asked.

"If you don't mind - - - "

"But, no. We have it reserved for you."

Escorting him past a garden of intervening tables, the *maitre d'* led Canfield to the very ringside. An instant later, a captain of waiters obeyed the snap of a finger directed at him, to leap forward and present dinner and wine menus.

Canfield brushed aside the thought of ordering a meal so soon after his last one, despite the remarkable flavor all food had acquired for him recently. He compromised by asking for a light *aperitif*. The *maitre d'* commented, "It's unusual to see you alone, Mr. Brown."

Canfield did not answer. His attention had strayed away, searching the vast crowded room. Suddenly, his eyes paused, focused - - - transfixed - - - on an exquisitely lovely girl with windblown red hair. She was chatting with her friends at a nearby table.

Who was she? Everything about her awakened familiar echoes: vivacious green eyes; full red lips; pale white complexion. Where had he seen her before? He racked his memory. Where?

In the next moment, the answer broke like the flash of lightning into his startled brain. She was the girl in the trimensional cube! The red-haired beauty whose young loveliness had been imprisoned forever inside the prism he had found on Oliver Brown's body - - - the girl who had stood beside Brown, himself!

Canfield's nerves yielded to a tremor of uneasiness. The girl would know him, then. If their eyes met and acknowledged each other, then - - - as a matter of course - - - an exchange of compliments would have to follow sometime in the evening. He had hardly expected this first test of identity to materialize so swiftly.

His gaze swept on. As it circled the room, it noted and registered the other revellers at adjoining tables. The preponderance of females stood out as much here, as it had stood out for Canfield earlier in the day when he observed the milling daytime crowds that packed the metropolis. He felt a sudden sick longing for the campus of New Harvard. That cloistered retreat had gone coed only since the last of the Atomic Wars - - - and there, at least, the masculine temperature was still in the ascendancy.

A sound of fanfare disrupted his chain of thinking. The lights dimmed. Gold-brocade curtains, shimmering like liquid sunshine, slowly drew back from a circular stage, revealing - - at the initial glance - - - an all-electronic brass section. The stage continued revolving, bringing into view more of the show orchestra: the massed violins, the enormous percussion instruments, the softer woodwinds, and finally the conductor, himself, a bald portly man. No robots performed in this organization, for no android automaton made would have been capable of interpreting the unwritten nuances to be found in twenty-first century music.

A long drawn note, based on a dissonance that at once piqued and tortured Canfield's ear, succeeded the fanfare - - - and the murmuring of the audience dropped to a whisper.

The burst of music preluded the entrance of a troupe of leaping pirouetting dancers whose frilly spangled costumes betrayed their origin as the Latin Belt. A drum began beating, low and throbbing. As the rhythm gathered tempo, the lithe girls and their aggressive partners suddenly exploded into action. Their yearning limbs and golden bodies

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intertwined in an expressive frenetic *allegro* that spelled out the theme of the orchestral piece, *Octet in Ecstasy*.

Tableau after tableau was enacted, frozen for a split second of time as blazing white light bathed the dancers and then dissolved in a chiaroscuro of eye-defying motion.

Canfield, himself, despite his speeded-up senses, found it difficult to grasp any one scene of the stroboscopic pageant in its entirety before the electrifying troupe had shattered the lovely illusion into eight weaving fragments . . . all while the orchestra elaborated a moaning shrieking obligato in the background.

The seductively entrancing ballet was at its height when Canfield's tensed ears caught the light metallic rustle of skirts just behind him. A female voice, soft and dulcet, yet pitched to penetrate the din, whispered: *"Scheikenkirtz*, Mr. Brown."

He turned rapidly, just in time to intercept a dazzling spotlight intended to focus on the dancers. The white-hot glare blinded his eyes. As far as his sense of sight was concerned, the remainder of the room instantly became steeped in pitch-black darkness. The mysterious speaker passed on, vanishing before he could even begin to determine who she was. His nostrils, however, caught a scent of perfume that awakened poignant echoes.

That was his only clue.

Whether the strange warning had come from the red-headed girl or not, he could not tell.

Scheikenkirtz!

The meaning suddenly sank in. He had heard the phrase before: *Remember the penalty for failure is the loss of immortality!*

This was the second time the Draconian threat had been leveled at him. Why, he wondered? Was Gorken's suspicion already being whetted?

Canfield continued staring into the dark. His eyes recovered from the cone damage, adjusted themselves to the gloom. His pupils widened, admitting illumination. Presently, the darkened interior of the Radium Cabana, almost completely blacked-out for the dance finale, became etched in profuse detail. He sought out the table where the red-haired girl had been sitting. She and her party had departed.

Again, mystery. Inexplicable mystery. Canfield found he had suddenly lost all taste for the remainder of the cabaret program. He got up, deposited a twenty-credit note on the table to salve over any inconvenience he'd caused the management, and rapidly made his way out of the theater-restaurant.

Just before exiting however, he allowed himself one last lingering glance at the exotic octet of dancers. They were now sprawled on the floor in front of the orchestra stage, engaged in gyrations so impossible that - - - suddenly, he blushed to the roots! He turned, shaken at that final scene. But then, he recalled certain curious customs of the ancient matriarchal culture of Egypt as revealed by startlingly pictorial revelations on papyrus - - - and reflected that what he had seen was probably not so shocking after all. History, indeed, had a way of repeating itself!

Outside, the night sky was still aglow with luminous splendor, half reflected, half real. Coruscating wheels of fire rose above the radiant pinnacles of the pleasure blocks. On the freeway, an endless stream of surface vehicles rolled by, blurring end-on-end into a dizzying maniacal pattern. No man, he thought, could have sorted out which car of the many thousands was the one carrying off certain passengers who had just newly departed from the Radium Cabana.

Canfield stood at the edge of the curb and regarded the scene with keen disappointment. Puzzlement gnawed at his brain. Then, as he recalled the perfumed scent that had accompanied his unknown communicant, a second tremor swept

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through his tense-muscled quivering body. A rare indefinable aroma, sweet but not cloying, it stirred engrams into remembrance in his body cells, recollecting for him some buried episode in his first youth.

He struggled to recall more clearly. Then suddenly, the episode came to life for him. He was nostalgically reminded of a blighted love when he was twenty-two. The girl had died of the Asiatic Plague the following year.

The oldest memories are often touched off by just such reappearances of half-forgotten scents - - - a phenomenon Proust, for example, had once remarked on, Canfield thought; and this was exactly what had happened to him. The scent was so nearly identical to the one out of his past, that for a moment it had actually transported him into the past. Curiously, he found himself wondering if his engrams would have reacted so violently, if his body had still remained at its original seventy-three-year-old level of apperception.

Well, he thought, there was nothing more he could do now - - - except continue enacting the role of Oliver Brown. But somehow, the adventure had ceased to be an intellectual game - - - and had become something more than a game with himself thrust right in the middle of it!

THE HOUR WAS not particularly late, when James Canfield returned by aero-cab to the Hotel Betelgeuse. Nor was he particularly weary when he pressed his 'door-key' to the entrance of his suite and the matching vibrations of the cube to the door caused the panel to slide open.

However, in the interval that had elapsed since he rushed forth from the Radium Cabana, Canfield had completed a tour through Strip Town that would have turned the most hardened twenty-first century roue to jelly.

What had surprised him most was the number of places in which the face of Oliver Brown had been recognized - - - the cabarets, the flesh-palaces where he window-shopped with normal reactions but didn't buy, the endless bars and casinos where he flung his money about but preserved his energy. In all of them, he had been recognized by fawning headwaiters and greedy coaxing girls - - - blondes and brunettes as well as the more popular blues and pale lavenders.

But he had also been surprised how few people except the *maitre d'hotel* at the Cabana had questioned his appearance without a bevy of female friends in tow - - - as if each saw gain for himself or herself in Brown's obvious loneliness.

Now, the night's reveling was over, the dreary task at an end. Considering he had tapped very little of his abundant supply of vigor, Canfield felt the better for it. He felt more willing to go on with his mission. He had looked in on spectacles that excited him and spectacles that appalled him; at times, he had even felt temptation seize him in the form of alluring arms and he would, might have yielded except for one tantalizing wisp of memory that held him back - - - a pair of vivid sea-green eyes in a lovely face framed by red hair.

As he stripped for bed, however, he wondered: What would tomorow bring for him? More of the same? Must he always live as Brown lived? Was this any but an insane man's way to relish and enjoy his youth? Was this sanity, at all?

No! - - - he answered, almost shouting the word aloud. Tomorrow, he would have to shake off this madness and become himself again. The Latin Belt still remained as a place of refuge. He could escape there. Didn't he have funds, the money he had deposited for himself when - - - ages ago, back in New Harvard - - - he had planned this venture. *Planned?* The world crashed on a painful echo. Had he forgotten? He was a dupe, a

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hypnotized automaton - - - and the plans he had followed up to now had not been his own, at all. They were the plans of Picozzi and the Ones.

But did they know about the secret bank account which he'd had Brady, his broker, arrange for him? He thought not. True, the Ones had made him - - - for a time - - - their mental slave; but in the process of hypno-controlling him, wasn't it possible that they had only sketched or outlined his course for him? Wasn't it possible that he could have worked up a few of the details on his own? Without their outside influence?

The more Canfield pondered the problem, the more he became certain that he should escape from this new bondage, despite his promise to track down Gorken.

Above all, he knew this: he did not want to die. Life had doubled, trebled in sweetness, now that its span had lengthened.

He lay down on the wide foam-mattressed bed, half-undressed. His mind was temporarily at ease. The problem appeared to be approaching a solution in part, at least. A vial of hypno-rest tablets, supplied evidently by the management, sat on the night stand, but Canfield swept them aside. His charged vibrant body felt no need for sedatives; he knew that his powerful mind could force his tingling nerves into a state of rest by mere effort of will.

Sleep, he ordered his body. *Sleep!*

In a moment, he was relaxed in quiet slumber.

QUIET, but not altogether dreamless! Two hours later, Canfield awoke with a start, in panic, conscious immediately of how much time had elapsed since he dozed off to the very second.

He had slept well, except for the last minute or so when suddenly the black folds of nightmare had descended on his unconscious mind. The details of the dream had fled with his waking, but the horror in them remained. Now, he discovered his body was bathed in cold sweat. He blinked his eyes. The bedroom was enveloped in stygian darkness, soundproofed against the endless raucous funmaking of the Betelgeuse's guests, sheltered against the encroachment of so much as a crack of light from outside the hotel walls. Lonely as the shut-in tomb, Canfield thought.

Awareness he was not alone suddenly destroyed his last remaining calm. *He was alone, but not alone!* Someone was present in the room with him; someone perched or coiled, invisible, in the oppressive shadow. Canfield shivered. He had the feeling he was being watched, studied, analyzed - - - like a pinned insect under the lens of a microscope. He felt as if the whole room had been turned into a huge dissecting slide.

Now, a severe penetrating chill crept into the room - - - crept in from outside or was generated in the air, itself. A marrow-freezing cold that to Canfield's flesh suggested the absolute zero of outer space. It was as though the creature that lurked in the darkened room with him had already existed for untold eons in a state of suspension equivalent to that of frozen helium or temperature even lower - - - and had never quite warmed up since.

And then - - - just as suddenly - - - the presence was gone. Gone, soundlessly. Vanished, as if it had never been - - - and warmth slowly returned to the suite.

Canfield snapped into action. He rolled out of the bed, flicked on the lights to full strength. Then, he rushed through the other rooms of the suite switching on glow-spheres and ceiling illumination wherever he moved, until finally the apartment was flooded with illumination and the rooms resembled the brilliant area under a lighted theater marquee. In that pitiless glare, no shadow larger than a pencil point could have survived.

Then and then only, Canfield allowed

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himself to relax. He plopped down in a soft downy chair and stared moodily into space. His young face looked grim, concerned, reflecting his fear.

He recalled now just what had started the nightmare that had plagued him prior to waking - - - that moment when he had come out of the dream in the very act of discovering the *thing*, whatever it might have been, watching him. Unfatigued, his sleeping mind had dredged out of his subconscious certain knowledge - - - knowledge that it spread before him, aware that his daytime mind had refused to face it in the last few hours. The knowledge of what was meant when Picozzi had said that *no member of the League ever knew how long his treatment was good for!*

It could be fifty years, fifty months, fifty weeks.

Or fifty days!

Which meant that in seven weeks, he might easily become seventy-three again! The constant succession of nightmares which now seemed his lot could turn into even more hideous reality. What human being could dare to live even a day in such purgatorial torment?

The answer came to Canfield immediately - - - plain as a simple equation.

Only a dedicated man.

Only a man with a clearly-defined purpose, a man to whom the giving of his life would be a small thing if to do so would better the condition of his race. All his philosophy had taught him that such were the only men whom time could not conquer.

An almost-forgotten passage from Baudelaire came back to him:

Nous Voulons . . .

Plonger au fond du gouffre, Enfer ou Ciel, qu'importe?

Heaven or hell, what did it matter?

Canfield arose, switched the lights off one after another until a small shadow reappeared in the room, a mere splotch of darkness cast on the floor under a massive table. He lifted his empty glass and held it out mockingly, in the direction of the unmoving blot.

"Well, old Captain," he toasted, addressing the shadow as Baudelaire had once addressed a shadow before him, "It is time to go."

Death, he knew, had been in the same room with him. And though the monstrous thing that threatened death had now departed, Canfield knew he would never be free of its memory until he had destroyed the creator of it. So in a matter of minutes, he thought, he, too - - - in as full a sense - - - had become dedicated.

He did not sleep anymore between that moment and dawn. He did not need to.

END OF BOOK I

The second and final Book of this gigantic and sensational novel will appear in the August issue of OTHER WORLDS, on sale June 1. Make sure you don't miss it, by reserving your copy with your newsdealer. The editor promises you that this completion of THE TIMELESS MAN will live up to the promise of Book I, building to a completely staggering climax as James Canfield comes face to face with the mysterious and utterly terrifying Gorken in a strange out-of-phase Time, in a Space between Spaces. As you read Book II, you will enter into a concept of incredible scientific scope, and you will find the ever-increasing pace of adventure almost too great to endure. You will gasp at the ramifications of the plot as it unfolds with an imaginative sweep unparalleled in modern science fiction. You will never forget the experience of participating in this brilliant novel. Nor will you forget Roger Arcot as he pulls surprise after surprise out of nowhere with the most brilliant writing this editor has seen in many, many years. *This* is *great* science fiction!

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LETTERS

Dear Ray:

I am writing this letter to *you* just because I feel like I really want to. It isn't about your magazine in particular, since, to be quite honest, I didn't know that it existed until a few days ago when I bought up some back-issues. Actually, I haven't read even one story in it as yet, but you will find my enclosed check for three dollars as a subscription payment. Well, now that you are thoroughly confused and wondering why in Heaven's name I am writing to you and what the point is, I'll explain.

I was merely skimming through the February 1953 issue, trying to alight on an interesting story to read when I found myself in the "Letters". There I read a letter from one Don Wilson, who was laying rather heavily on writers Shaver, Byrne and Phillips some choice and black disgust. Then I read your answer. It wasn't the four-line "So who really cares?" type that most editors pass off as answers. Some may ask why you haven't hit the "slicks" or why you haven't written the "great science fiction novel to come", but believe me, Ray, you don't have to write another line as long as you live (and I hope it is a long time). What you said there should be framed and placed above the desk of every editor in the nation, and a writer should be made to read it slowly before he starts his unholy traduction against the editor, who had the gall to refuse his MS, or ask for a cut, or made changes in it. No, Ray, I'm not a teenager shouting hooray for the editor I love; I am a twenty-eight year old fan and writer, who wishes deeply to thank you for a beautiful piece of honesty without any flip or snide remarks.

I said I am a writer, well, that's pretty brash since I haven't made a sale as yet, but I've had my lumps, the pink, blue and yellow kind. I started out trying detective pulps because writing seemed exciting, and the mystery pulps seemed as good as any place to make an easy sale. I went no where fast; after three or four strike-outs I tossed it over, and gave it up. Now, I see why I couldn't sell? Crude writing? Yes, but the main reason was that I didn't get the kick out of knocking it out; all I wanted was the cash and the acclaim. Then two years ago I found science fiction and I began reading, and reading, and reading. Then when I was sure, I said, "This is for me." 1c a word or 5c a word, I don't care; this is for me. The pulps or the aristocrats, I don't care; this is for me. My writing mystery copy was like trying to plow a rice-paddy with a mule team; the right equipment, but the wrong place to put it to good and effective use. Some may ask, "If so, why haven't I sold?" Simple, I'm lazy; I need a pusher, a prodder. I guess it boils down to the same thing, Ray, in our chosen vocations; WE LIKE WHAT WE ARE DOING. Why should anyone ask more of us? I like the short-story with a sharp twist on the end, but some learned persons say, "The surprise-ending stories went out in the 20's." So why do I continue to write that type? Once again, I like what I'm doing. It may seem to you that I draw the comparison too close since your job pays and as yet mine dosen't. But I'm not worried; I have faith in what I'm doing and *I will sell.* What good is the science fiction job, I put together (with sweat and cigarette after cigarette; I'm that kind of writer, darn it)? Well, I think they will, when published, give thoughts, enjoyment and amusement to other people. I don't want to seem to be giving you my life story, Ray, and certainly not plugging my copy. But it is the only way I know to show you that I like what you said and not in an aloof, detached way. It comes in the final analyses to three things about us. First: we like what we are doing. Secondly: we have faith in what we are doing. Third: we give pleasure to others by giving them polished parts of ourselves. If this isn't enough to expect from a job, or for that matter, Life itself, then I'm on the wrong planet, Mister.

I hope I haven't taken too much of your time with my letter, but just wanted to say thanks for your faith in the newcomers, and express my admiration for the honest backing you give your boys.

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Ray, all I and every other new-comer ask from an editor is *an honest look-see*, and it's darn nice to know that we are assured of it at your shop.

By the way, it might interest you to know what one guy thinks of you and the job you're doing. I quote from a letter I recently received from Frank Arthur Kerr. I don't think Frank would mind my quoting him. "Palmer has a way of developing in the reader either a fanatical loyalty or a loathing of himself. I happen to be fanatically loyal to Palmer, as may be obvious from an article of mine in the late fanzine MOTE a couple of years back, and another due shortly in Dick Geis' SCIENCE FICTION REVIEW. Anyway, I couldn't pretend to give any sort of objective view of Palmer in less than 3500 words, so just try a few issues (of OW) on my word and then decide for yourself. Incidentally, we pro-Palmerites are a tiny minority in fandom."

Whether fandom likes it or not, I'll go along with Frank.

If you should find a moment to drop me a line I would appreciate a little info on what OW is using now in lengths and slants. I remain.

Alfred McCoy Andrews
210 16th Ave. So.
Birmingham 5, Ala.

No, the pro-Palmerites aren't in the minority. When we produce, they like us, and they say so. Right now, a lot of them are saying so—and by Heck, it goes to show a science fiction fan is just that!

As for lengths, slants, etc. we haven't a taboo in the world! You write 'em, from the heart, and we'll read 'em—and if they've got what they should have, we'll buy them! One thing I learned early was not to impose my wishes on writers, but only to influence them with helpful suggestions, when they came to me with a manuscript which had weaknesses. I can say freely that any help of that kind I gave was never wasted ..... Rap.

Mr. Ray Palmer:

Been reading science fiction since before Amazing Stories was born when Gernsback found that the boys were buying Science and Invention just to read the stories in it.

Do you remember "Dr. Hackensaw's Secrets", and "Around the Universe"? Read almost every issue of Amazing until it went to pot a couple of years ago and has not been worth reading since. Subscribe to four SF mags, and usually find at least one story in yours that is superior to all the rest each issue. Going to remain on your subscription list as long as we last.

Like that idea of yours to keep alive Ed Burroughs characters, and I will certainly take your word when you say you have found a writer good enough to do the job properly. Thought a lot of old Ed both as an author and friend. Knew him when he lived in Waikiki at the Niumalu Hotel, and later when he flew with me when I dropped bombs on Jaluit and Ailingalap from a B-24 - - - he was representing the Los Angeles *Times* as war correspondent. After observing him under Jap ack-ack fire, I could see why he was so well qualified to write about guts and courage. He had plenty himself.

Never wrote a letter to a magazine editor before, probably never will again. Simply had to join your campaign to keep Burroughs characters rolling, though, so had to write something to wrap my dime in.

In case you publish this, I want to go on record to certify that in my opinion a chap named Ray Palmer has done more constructive and intelligent work in the field of science fiction, both as a writer and editor, than anyone else. After reading, observing, and enjoying it for nearly 35 years, I am grateful. Thank you, Mr. Ray Palmer.

Oliver R. Franklin
Lt. Col. USAF Retired,
Route 2,
Fort Myers,
Florida.

Your letter telling about Burroughs' wartime experiences is vastly interesting to us. We had our series in Amazing Stories interrupted by that very jaunt, and we certainly regretted it. Thanks for your kind words—and we hope we can continue to live up to them! .... Rap.

Rap:

The only reason that I picked up the November issue of OW was the word "Tarzan" on the cover. Really, Ray, I'd like to read this new novel, but can you picture Tarzan on Mars? That stretches the old imagination a bit, don't you think? I've read about all of ERB's books and the idea is way off base, to my way of thinking.

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You say that the Burroughs' interests want to let all the characters die, well then, how come one sees Tarzan and John Carter in the comic books on the stands and in the newspapers? This does not speed up the process of dying a bit. How come?

If this story and author is so red-hot you could publish it with different names. There's nothing wrong with copying Burroughs' style, characters and ideas; witness the rash of Ki-Gor, Kaanga and assorted Jungle Lords in the magazines for the past ten years.

Fiction House published "Ki-Gor" in *Jungle Stories* for years and as far as I know, no law suit from anyone. I guess this magazine has folded now and the way could be open for you to take over and if these stories are any good, you could make yourself a mint, boy. Especially if you could get St. John to illustrate.

By the way, what's the chances of purchasing a St. John original for my study?

As for your "crusade", even though I can't see it myself, I'll send loads of letters to the Burroughs' interests for you when you give the word. That's the least I can do for you in return for the many hours of reading and relaxing in Amazing Stories since 1938. I got sick and tired of the tripe in 1949 and still look back at the early forties as the "Golden Years".

I've always liked your "personal" interest in your magazines and feel that this is a big selling point. It's something the other mags lack.

As a bit of idle speculation, I wonder if your new author is "John Bloodstone" who you heralded as "the logical successor to Burroughs" when his "Last Days of Thronas" appeared? Or maybe the guy who used to publish the Burroughs Bulletin? Oh well, we'll soon see.

Anyhow Rap, I'm with *you*, and here's hoping that you get back on your feet financially and stop reprinting illustrations and covers from a few years back, and by the way, give Hal Annas back to the Indians. Bring back the Science Fiction and Fantasy I like and you'll be sure of selling at least one copy a month.

Fred Cook
912½ Slayton Street
Grand Haven, Mich.

You've raised a vital point. And as Ray Palmer, I find myself agreeing with you 100%. No, I couldn't picture Tarzan on Mars. And maybe I've misled everybody, because actually, this isn't Tarzan on Mars—this is JOHN CARTER. By this I mean that as far as science fiction goes, John Carter IS science fiction; while Tarzan is not. Thus, I myself could never picture Tarzan on Mars —until John Bloodstone did it for me. Fred, Tarzan is no longer the ape-man, the Ki-Gor type, but a "character" like John Carter, as wonderful as he can be! I could not believe my eyes, as I read the story . . . but THIS is the Tarzan that he was in his early days, only many times better.

In publishing Burroughs' material in OTHER WORLDS, we promise you that we intend to publish science fiction. Real science fiction. This novel should be described as another of the Mars series, rather than another of the Tarzan series. It is definitely not a Tarzan story. If you line up the books in two categories, there can be no hesitation in putting it in the category labeled "John Carter." Thus, I admit, perhaps I've misled many. I myself did not like many of the Tarzan books, and was disappointed in my hero in his antics in them. But THIS Tarzan I like! He's terrific, and he FITS on Mars like a glove.

Yes, we can get St. John to illustrate. In fact, we wouldn't think of anything else! ..... *Rap.*

Dear RAP:

I don't exactly know what prompted me to buy your first king-size OW. I've been an avid Madge fan for the past two years, and have been buying them (SF mags, Madge in particular) for the past three. But in those three years, I have never once bought a copy of OW. It seems a pure freak of Ever-lovin' Fate that I happened to be attracted by the cover. It was out of the ordinary for an SF mag, and lately, it is only the out-of-the-ordinary that attracts me. I am sick to death of the psychological novels that have appeared on all sides of me since I really began reading the mags. It confronts me everywhere that I look, except in Madge. Madge may not be the best mag ever published, but it was the only one that was not filled to overflowing with those pieces of undying prose that sicken me so.

Anyway, I've just finished Hal Annas' triology, and I am not exaggerating when I say it is the best adventure story I've ever read in an SF mag. The characters were not in the least stereotyped. Each

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was as real as they could possibly have been. I hope someday to be an SF writer, and that is the type of stuff I want to write; but up 'til now, there has been so little of it, I thought that the market was not open to it. Now I can strive toward the day when I can see some of my stuff in print, not getting that much-feared rejection slip because there will be no room for this adventure that I hold so cherished.

Pardon the mush, but when I write something, I like to put my exact feelings into it. And those are my exact feelings.

I noticed that there were only two shorts in the latest ish. But between these and the WITCH OF THE DARK STAR (say, how come you switched the titles? I thought that the series was to be called RECKONING FROM ETERNITY, and that INFINITY TO INFINITY was to be the title of Book III. Explain please.), I can say that it was well worth it. Enclosed find my dime for Tarzan.

Say, in Hal Annas' stories: did you ever stop to consider that a flashlight could be classified as a photon projector? One gripe in closing: (and I'm happy to see that neither you nor Bill Hamling have ever, in my knowledge, been guilty of it.) Why do they take those crummy, idiotic, plotless works of lifeless prose that could never be good stories, label them satires, (and they never even come close to the definition of a satire!) and stuff them down the throats of the unsuspecting. Take for an example Collier's novelette: THE LOMOKOME PAPERS, by Herman Wouk. Granted that it was very well written, especially the introduction, it was still a very pessimistic story without a touch of humor, and with a totally hackneyed plot. They called it a satire, therefore it is now a classic. That type of thing disgusts me. And if any respectable mag (I hereby exclude Galaxy, and feel F&SF has been guilty of it also, tho I still rank it a top mag in the SF field.) does such a thing, it is no longer worthy of the title SCIENCE FICTION. I would like to hear, if possible, your views on this.

Joseph Casey, Jr.
9 Lewis Ave
Jersey City 6, N. J.

The other day we talked to Madge's editor, and he assured us that his magazines will be action science fiction from now on. So, the magazine should continue to be good. However, we told him confidentially that we were going to make OTHER WORLDS far superior to his book, and that was because we were going to make it SCIENCE FICTION, and that there were NO science fiction magazines being published today. He, like you, will be waiting to find out what I mean - - and you will; because OTHER WORLDS will be the ONLY science fiction magazine in the world (unless some editor tumbles to what it is I have in mind). Science fiction magazines today are simply adventure magazines (except the "crummy, idiotic, lifeless clan you decry so heartily), because the science in them is no different than the background in any adventure story. Mars, or Space, is no different in concept today than Cambodia or Africa were to the Adventure story in the 20's. Thus, to be labeled science fiction today, a story has to have more than just a non-urban background. You'll find that difference in OTHER WORLDS from now on. I feel quite safe here, because none of my proteges (Hamling, Browne, etc.) have ever understood what I meant when I said science fiction, and I'm not going to tell them now . . . they do too darn well with their adventure stories!

That confusion in titles was because I was thinking slow. I am revising my ideas so swiftly these days that even a title might not stand overnight, even after it's in type. So, be prepared for some confusion until the old brain begins working on all four! Annas' 90,000 worder is properly titled Reckoning From Eternity, as a book.

You ask for fireworks when you ask my opinion on the sort of thing you mention. I ask, what right has Herman Wouk to write science fiction? He's out of his depth. Just because he's Herman Wouk, and Colliers buys his name, gives neither the right to assume that either knows what a science fiction story is. Satire indeed. Just a way of covering up what is actually an insult. I'm surprised that Wouk would write something he obviously doesn't comprehend, for the single consideration of money. His acceptance of that assignment dropped him right out of my book. I wouldn't read any of his books now if you paid me to do it. The man isn't a writer, he's a jobholder - - and no matter how good he holds his job, I can still sneer at him and say "jobholder!" It would be a mat-

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ter of pride with me, and I wouldn't be proud of selling out the other guy. Plain and simple, Colliers should have had an ACE science fiction writer do their bit - - and pay him the same rates they paid Wouk. Shame on both of them! It's pirates like these who filch the big gravy from our boys. Wouk? What science fiction did he ever write? Never heard of him. ..... Rap.

Dear Rap:

I kinda thought that I'd write in and express my opinion of your mag.

The cover, that was pretty bad. Jones is a fine artist but he really goofed up on that one. Inside illos were okay except the ones for "Daughter Of Doom".

About the stories:

Here are my ratings:

1- "The Big Noise"
2- "The Phantom Milkman"
3- "Daughter Of Doom"
4- "Space Is For The Young"
5- "The Strangest Man In The Universe"
6- "The Immortality Of Prof. Bickerstaffe"

You have a pretty good mag according to the current status of the SF field.

Re the letter by Albert de Pina in your Feb. ish.—You Mr. de Pina (this is just what you expected from us "howling adolescent fans") are an OLD FUDDY-DUDDY. If you want stories which have a "sound basis in science" go read a science book or better yet read a story from ASTOUNDING or some other high level mag of the 30's which featured stories that only the big high learned ones could understand. Did you ever stop to think that there are other fen besides us "howling adolescents" and you learned fen? These fen are just ordinary folk who like science-fiction, not space opera and not highly scientific stories. You Mr. de Pina will never get the kind of story that you want from good ole Rap. Since when does Galaxy and Astounding feature scientific stories. Beats me.

Marty Fleischman
1247 Grant Avenue
Bronx 56, New York

We goofed on the covers for February. We had a Jones set of plates ready to go, and Shaver's darned deros stole the blue plate. So we had to use a Bok. And some people can't accept Bok's weird style. We like it, personally, but we agree it is art, rather than pulp magazine cover material. Bok won't be mad at us for saying that, because he's a friend of ours.

When you read THE TIMELESS MAN in this and the next issue, you'll find a SCIENTIFIC story! And you'll find a TERRIFIC story. And we're all puffed up about it! Frankly, no magazine today publishes anything anywhere near as good. Nor can they boast, in the same issue, a STEOGAR, or a GROVE OF GOD (and anything else that manages to fit into this issue - - we hope!) Marty, the stories we've got on hand have us bathed in a roseate glow that turns the whole Wisconsin sky pink! Just you wait and see - - and Mr. de Pina will be as delighted as you. These stories are for everybody! Our secret formula, you know. ..... Rap.

Dear Rap:

Ever since AMAZING-FANTASTIC went new format, SF began (or was already in) its screaming nose-dive. I am a fan from way back to the days of "The Green Man", and believe me, I am frantic with grief over the gloomy future of this field. Force of habit kept me buying the pocket-sized mags (plus Valigursky's covers), but the percentage of good material was miserable. I tried them all, in vain . . . either there was too much cybernetics, robotry and superficial intellectualism, or they sounded as if from the pages of THE SATURDAY EVENING POST. That goes for all the extra features. It seems only you can give us provocative editorials and letter columns that say something. How about that? Everything you leave crumbles, and anything you start skyrockets. Which brings me to what I really have to say. I am ashamed to say that it took me this long to realize that you have terminated my search. *OTHER WORLDS is it.* I knew you had entered the field earlier, but I had despaired so, that I thought no one could save it. Your large pulp caught my eye (now who else would be so bold?), and as I was always for the return, I bought it. Your editorial could have been written by me (not quite so well, of course), so much was it a mirror of my mind. I am waiting for the first part of the trilogy, but what stories I read were excellent. I repeat . . . EXCELLENT. As regards this mag, I want it known that I'm becoming a second lifer. I agree with you 100% concerning Burroughs, Doyle, et al. Not so much what they wrote, but how they did it. Es-

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pecially the personality angle . . . that's what's wrong with the others and right with yours. You don't read your mags, they *speak* to you. Another thing, I love good fantasy. At first I thought Ziff-Davis had a good idea, but when they began putting out just two SF mags, with a de-emphasis on the supernatural (what a nebulous word), then that was it as far as I was concerned. Your "Phantom Milkman" piece of macabre was the best I'd read in years. Yes, keep it that way . . . a free hand to the authors (who dares to define "science" stories). Especially the giants of the Golden Age, if possible, like Rog and the gang. I'm still trying to figure out his "From the Matrix of Time". Rap, I'm so excited, I want you to know that in my own meager way (and I know there are many, many more), I'll go broke myself trying to help. Believe me, you deserve it.

By the way, did you see that article in the last COLLIER'S of February? Underground . . . the very idea. Also, have you been keeping up with Criswell's predictions? I read him daily in the newspaper, and he repeatedly prophesizes 1956 as *the* year . . . UFO's will be proven to be extra-terrestial, and Palomar (no less) will issue a report this spring debunking many theories due to startling new revelations from outer space. Mars will once and for all be proven to have a network of navigation and irrigation canals. 1960 will see the conquest of the moon. Etc.

Besides the 3 bucks, enclosed will be a dime for the November issue of OW . . . the other 9 dimes are for your Burroughs campaign. Will you print in a future "personals" column what back issues of OW you have, if any. Actually, I would settle for the first pulp-size to start my collection, but will gladly pay the full price if I could get, say, the first 14.

Some day I hope to be able to walk into your bear trap and visit with you, but no coffee . . . I would be honored to take you, the Mrs. (what a woman she must be) and your boy out to supper.

Robert Weirauch
28 Maple Drive
Belleville, Ill.

Have a care, there! We have two girls too! And they all eat like horses! It sure is wonderful to get so many letters saying what you say. All this time people have been suffering in silence. And the editors with any sense (aw shucks, no insult intended, we just get carried away by our rabid fanaticism about sf) have done an about face. Those who haven't, are going broke.

About Criswell's predictions, I'll make a few of my own right here: UFO's will not be proven to be anything. The army will go on monotonously saying "There ain't no such thing". Palomar will not debunk anybody, but will announce new discoveries (all of them as wrong as the previous ones - - how can you have faith in the new ones, if they admit the old ones were wrong?) Mars' canals were proved long ago. John Carter did a splendid job of that, assisted by some of the world's best astronomers. All the new telescope will show is the same straight lines, only not in such sharp detail. The bigger the telescope, the hazier the (nearby) image. 1960 will see anybody who tries to go to the moon very dead. But 1960 will not see any conquest of anything, not even our own upper atmosphere. Ultra-high level ventures are still many years away. By the way, have you heard the story (published in TOWN JOURNAL, in "Newsfront") that the U. S. is "keeping atomic air-bases aloft in the sky?" Right now? Satellite bases, loaded with atom bombs? This is a "loaded" article, if we ever saw one. Will come in handy as "alibi No. 1" to squelch extra-terrestrial "exposes". "Humph!" they will say. "They were ours all the time". And they will be liars. Truth is, nobody knows, not even Criswell.

Back issues: We'll try to list them in some hole at the end of a story in this issue. We haven't got too many. First 14, we know, are all out. ..... Rap.

Dear Rap:

Maybe I should state right off I am a woman. So far, I can't see that you have any letters from a gal, so maybe this will get shoved in the wastebasket.

I had SF to read before I could understand half of it, and my mother never passed up a magazine as far as I know.

I detest some of the drivel printed in a lot of the SF magazines, in fact I almost quit getting them when I bought OW and read your editorial. If there is still someone around who will give us a readable story, and without the assumption that we readers are scientists, I for one will keep on buying.

I would like to see more stories like

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"The Phantom Milkman".

Sherry Winfree
1934 Grant,
Denver, Colo.

Dear Mr. Palmer:

You have asked to be called "Rap", but I will call you Mr. Palmer as I am only eleven years old, and I don't think "Rap" would be respectful.

I was introduced to science-fiction by your February issue of OTHER WORLDS. I found it both entertaining and exciting. If other issues are half as good, you will have gained another fan.

Diane Dubrow
6 Kenjack Terrace
Albany 5, N. Y.

Thanks, Diane, and you can bet we'll see that future issues are even better. ..... *Rap.*

Dear Mr. Ray Palmer:

O.W. is the best of science fiction magazines (I think). "Daughter of Doom" was terrific. I couldn't put the magazine down until I finished the story.

Mrs. Rowland Wilson
12822 So. Western Ave.
Gardena, Calif.

Ordinarily we don't print such flattering letters, but we've got to be fair to us once in awhile and we got so many of these letters, we can't ignore them all. After all, justification is a mighty nice thing - - and it seems our attempt to bring sf back to its former glory is being justified. ..... *Rap.*

Dear Rap:

Yea for OTHER WORLDS. It is undoubtedly the top science fiction magazine. The other good ones are *Amazing, Fantastic, Imagination, Imaginative Tales,* and *Astounding.* OW is better than the first four because of the editorials (the stories and letters are of the same calibre). It is better than *Astounding* because I like the stories better, although *Astounding* is a wonderful magazine.

"Daughter of Doom", whoopee! "Space is for the Young" wonderful. "The Immortality of Professor Bickerstaffe", good. "The Big Noise", wonderful. "The Phantom Milkman", better than the average stf story. "The Strangest Man In The Universe", wonderful.

You may correctly assume that I like your magazine.

Do you send OW to the subscribers in bags? If you do, I'll subscribe.

Frank Saunders,
8506 Kedvale Ave.
Skokie, Ill.

We send OW subs in envelopes, as this gives them the best possible protection. ..... *Rap.*

Dear Rap:

Recently I purchased a small segment of Lloyd Eshbach's collection, namely *Amazing* from Jan. '42 to Dec. '46. Rap, if you can bring OW up to that standard, what a magazine we'll have! I suppose I don't have to tell you I'm pulling for you all the way. Wow, you've got me panting with expectations for those novels you promised. What headliners, too! And I don't care what anybody says, I LIKE SHAVER! What are the names of those novels coming up?

Deen A. Warren
54 Park Way
San Anselmo, Calif.

A list? Well, we'll give you a partial list of what we've on hand:

1. *THE METAMORPHS* (36,000) *S. J. Byrne (Incredibly good!)*
2. *TRI-INFINITY* (40,000) *Barry P. Miller (Our new discovery, and he's sensational.)*
3. *THE LAST SUMMER OF LORRAN* (200,000) *Also Miller . . . What a novel!*
4. *THE FIRES OF KESSA* (12,000) *Don Wilcox. Superb novelette.*
5. *THE SWORD OF ALDONES* (68,000) *Marion Zimmer Bradley. You'll love her for this!*
6. *RAIN OF FIRE* (30,000) *Hal Annas. Far superior to his Infinity trilogy.*
7. *TARZAN ON MARS* (100,000) *John Bloodstone. ! ! ! ! !*
8. *RELUCTANT EVE* (20,000) *Evelyn Martin. Our other new discovery, and very proud we are!*
9. *LAKE OF EGYPT* (30,000) *Richard S. Shaver. His critics will look silly!*
10. *A whole host of shorter stories, all excellent (like the ones in this issue!)*

Need we say more? ..... *Rap.*

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By S. J. Byrne

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Ray Palmer, Amherst, Wisc.

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